

U.S. embassy to close today

AMMAN (AFP) — The United States embassy in Amman has decided to close its doors today as the likelihood of strikes on neighbouring Iraq increases, a western diplomat said here Wednesday. "The U.S. embassy along with all American agencies in Jordan have received orders to close on Thursday," the diplomat said. The source said the embassy would also be closed Friday and Saturday as usual, adding that it was "not certain" whether or not the embassy would reopen Sunday. The British embassy in Amman, meanwhile, has stepped up security and advised its nationals to be alert, although the embassy itself will remain open Thursday, the diplomat said. Jordan's coalition of opposition parties supports Baghdad and frequently lashes out at the United States and Britain for their "aggressive stance" against Iraq.

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Jordan closes border with Iraq

AMMAN (J.T.) — Jordan early today closed its borders with Iraq as a precautionary measure to prevent an influx of refugees to the Kingdom. Interior Minister Nayef Qadi said, "We have closed our borders with Iraq, and we don't intend to permit the entry of people coming from Iraq." Qadi told the Jordan Times, "Our instructions are to prevent any possible waves of refugees from Iraq to Jordan as a result of the military strike," the minister told the Jordan Times. Qadi reiterated the government's position that "Jordan will not open its borders for refugees, but at the same time, will be willing to offer any possible assistance and help, if needed, on the Iraqi side [of the border]." However, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported that until around 1.30 a.m. in the morning, passenger movement between Iraq and Jordan proceeded as normal with no sign of crowding in the Rushwadi area. Hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing Iraq flooded Jordan during the first Gulf war, severely burdening the Kingdom's economy.

Israel 'ready'

JEL AVIV (Agencies) — Israel said Thursday its defences were "ready" as U.S. and British air strikes on Baghdad began but added it hoped that it would not be involved in the conflict. "Our defences are ready," said Avi Benayahu, a spokesman for Israeli Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai. "This time we are not implicated and I hope we will not be," Benayahu said.

Car burns near White House

WASHINGTON (AFP) — A car caught fire Wednesday inside the security zone near the White House, but officials could not immediately say what caused it. The fire, which was quickly controlled, began shortly after U.S. officials announced that forces had begun air strikes against targets in Iraq.

Charity says wait for Santa flight before bombing

REYKJAVIK (R) — An Icelandic charity said on Wednesday it would plead with the United Nations to stop possible military fire on Iraq as it was preparing to fly in gifts and medical aid to Iraqi children. "Nothing justifies bombing innocent children. We want to say to you, Santa — Santa is on his way," said Thor Magnusson, founder of the charity Peace 2000 International. Last year the charity obtained permission to fly a civilian aircraft to Baghdad despite tight controls on Iraqi airspace. The group said it had sent a letter to U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan asking for the same permission earlier this month but had not yet received a response. Icelandic children have donated thousands of gifts for this year's Santa.

Iran releases 196 Iraqi POWs

BAGHDAD (AP) — Iran on Wednesday released 196 Iraqi and 16 non-Iraqi soldiers captured during the 1980-88 war, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said. The ICRC said in a statement that the remains of one Iraqi POW was also handed over to Iraq during the prisoners' release at the Khosravi-Mundhar checkpoint on the Iran-Iraq border. It did not identify the 16 non-Iraqi POWs, but many Egyptians and Palestinians living in Iraq had volunteered to fight for Iraq in the war.

U.S. launches 'substantial' strikes against Iraq

Agencies

ANTI-AIRCRAFT guns opened fire repeatedly in Baghdad Thursday as the United States launched "substantial" military strikes against Iraq. There was no word on casualties. The firing lit up the night sky, created loud explosions and violently shook windows of the Information Ministry building near the center of Baghdad, where foreign reporters are required to work from. After the first round of anti-aircraft firing at 12:49 a.m. (2149 GMT Wednesday), the capital was shaken by a second round of explosions at 1:00 a.m. Thursday (2200 GMT Wednesday), lasted about 30 seconds. A third round of blasts hit Baghdad for less than a minute at 2:29 a.m. (2329 GMT Wednesday). At least one incoming missile was heard and a huge fiery glow lit the horizon. Cable News Network (CNN) said. Orange glows streaked toward the sky as the anti-aircraft guns let loose volley after volley of shots.

Shortly after the second round of firing, White House spokesman Joe Lockhart said the U.S. military forces "have launched a substantial military strikes against Iraq."

Military officials said the attacks involved long-range missiles.

It was not immediately clear which sites were targeted and if the attack accomplished its mission.

But President Bill Clinton, in a nationally televised address, said he ordered airstrikes on military and security targets, saying that if left unchecked Iraqi President Saddam Hussein

would use chemical and biological weapons.

"I have ordered a strong, sustained series of air strikes against Iraq," he said.

Clinton said he had acted quickly to avoid launching military action during the Holy Month of Ramadan.

Clinton, speaking from the Oval Office, said he acted "to protect the national interest of the United States" and Iraq's neighbours in the Middle East.

"Saddam Hussein must not be allowed to threaten his neighbours with nuclear weapons, poison gas or biological weapons," he said.

"Iraqi leaders were wrong if they thought the impeachment debate here would distract U.S. officials from Baghdad's standoff with U.N. arms inspectors," Clinton said.

Iraqi President Saddam Hussein "may have thought the serious debate... would distract America or weaken our resolve... but when we must act in America's vital interest we will do so," he said.

Senate Majority leader Trent Lott criticised the military action even before it was formally announced.

"While I have been assured by administration officials that there is no connection with the impeachment process in the House of Representatives, I cannot support this military action in the Persian Gulf at this time," his statement said.

"Both the timing and the policy are subject to question," he said in a statement.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair told reporters British involvement in the operation dubbed "Desert Fox" would be significant.

(Continued on page 12)



Unidentified U.N. weapons inspectors carry their belongings on their arrival in Amman. Twenty inspectors arrived here on Wednesday after the U.N. ordered them to leave Baghdad (Reuters photo)

Jordan following crisis closely

AMMAN (J.T.) — Prime Minister Fayez Tarawneh said Jordan was following the situation in Iraq with extreme concern.

"We are following this morning's developments very closely and with the utmost seriousness," said Prime Minister Fayez Tarawneh referring to the evacuation of U.N. weapons inspectors from Iraq earlier Wednesday.

Addressing a Lower House of Parliament session on Wednesday, Tarawneh told deputies he saw the evacuation very "worrying."

Foreign minister Abdul Ilah Al Khateib said resorting to military action would not resolve the problem of weapons of mass destruction.

"The best means to resolving the crisis would be to adhere to (resolutions of) international legitimacy to arrive at a comprehensive review with the objective of ending the suffering of the brotherly Iraqi people," Khateib said in a statement carried by the Jordan News Agency, Petra.

The Lower House, meanwhile, denounced renewed U.S. military threats against Iraq and called on the international community to intervene in order to stop the escalation of the latest U.N.-Iraq crisis.

A statement issued by the House following a regular session said: "The Lower House of Parliament has been following with deep concern the latest crisis and hopes the world community will step in and stop the escalation, which could lead to further suffering for the Iraqi people."

"The House believes that the use of force is not a way to settle disputes among nations and

believes that no country is entitled to implement U.N. resolutions alone, since such a task falls within the jurisdiction of the world organisation," the statement continued.

The House called on the world community "to condemn any use of force against Iraq" while urging the country to be "fully committed to the requirements of the international community."

It also asked U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan to undertake the task of settling the dispute in a manner that would "safeguard Iraq's sovereignty and territorial integrity."

The statement demanded that the parliaments of Arab countries adopt a unified stand in the face of any aggressive acts against Iraq and find a way to help the Iraqi people out of their present ordeal.

The United States and Britain called off airstrikes after Iraq promised on Nov. 12 to cooperate fully with the

China condemns use of force against Iraq

Agencies

CHINA CONDEMNED the use of force against Iraq Wednesday as an emergency meeting of the U.N. Security Council broke up after reports that the U.S. had launched a bombing campaign against Iraq.

A badly divided council had been discussing a report by chief U.N. weapons inspector Richard Butler which concluded that Iraq had not kept its promise to cooperate with inspectors during the past month.

The council was expected to meet again late Wednesday after diplomats consult their capitals.

Secretary-General Kofi Annan emerged from the emergency council meeting looking grim. Asked whether he had any comment on reports that Baghdad was being bombed, he replied: "No comment."

Iraq's U.N. Ambassador Nizar Hamdoun met Annan before the attacks began and asked him "to try to do whatever in his capacity to dissuade certain members of the Security Council not to do anything that has not been adopted by the Security Council."

But it was too late and the Iraqi envoy appeared resigned to a U.S. attack. "It looks like the United States is determined to go for a military strike regardless of what the Security Council membership feel about it, and that's very bad," Hamdoun said.

The United States and Britain called off airstrikes after Iraq promised on Nov. 12 to cooperate fully with the

weapons inspectors and allow unfettered access to all sites and documents. But after Butler reported Tuesday that "Iraq did not provide the full cooperation it promised" the prospect of military action intensified.

The United States and Britain insist they have authority under previous Security Council resolutions to attack Iraq in an effort to force Baghdad's full compliance with the inspectors.

But Iraq's most vocal supporters on the council — Russia, France and China — insist the Security Council must sanction any military action.

China's U.N. Ambassador Qin Huaen was visibly angry when he emerged from the meeting. "There is absolutely no excuse or pretext to use force against Iraq," he said.

"The use of force not only has serious consequences for the implementation of Security Council resolutions but also poses a threat to international as well as regional stability."

The council is also divided over the negative tone of Butler's report and his decision to evacuate all inspectors from Baghdad without consulting council members.

In his report Tuesday to Annan, Butler said Iraq had imposed new restrictions on the work of the U.N. Special Commission, known as UNSCOM, which he heads.

And he said Iraq's conduct over the past month "ensured that no progress was able to be made in either the fields of disarmament or accounting for its prohibited weapons programmes."

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Government to issue decision on IPC pipelines case on Saturday

BY Caroline Faraj

AMMAN — The government is to decide the fate of the Iraqi Petroleum Company (IPC) pipelines sale next Saturday, Minister of Water and Energy Hani Mulki said Wednesday after submitting an official report on the case to the Parliament.

"The government's decision on the IPC case will be clear on Saturday, but after we look into the report," Mulki told the Jordan Times.

Mulki who yesterday submitted to the Lower House Committee for Energy and Natural Resources the full report of the official investigation on the IPC, hoping to get their evaluation soon.

"We gave the Lower House committee the full report

with all the investigation committee comments on it," Mulki said. "Then the government will make the proper decision based on all parties' views," he added.

"We cannot confiscate opinions... Each one has the right to have his own evaluation, and to decide who is right and wrong," Mulki said.

The final 27-page report included all comments and evaluations, in addition to a supplementary report of the Audit Bureau member in the official committee.

Deputy Ali Abu Rbailha, head of the Lower House Committee for Energy and Natural Resources, commented on the report after the meeting, saying, "It is clear that there are differences in the views of the official

investigation committee, especially in the value and the possible uses of the pipelines."

"We need to study the report carefully, although it is clear that there was negligence and squandering of public funds," said Abu Rbailha.

He pointed to the reservation raised by the Audit Bureau member about the report.

Mulki, however said the government gave the full detailed report to the committee, "because we wanted the report to list every member's reservation or evaluation on fair grounds. We cannot confiscate opinions," he added.

(Continued on page 12)

Lower House refers request to lift Deputy Abbadi's immunity to its legal committee

By Fairouz Abu-Ghazaleh

AMMAN — Lower House Speaker Abdul Hadi Majali on Wednesday asked the House Legal Committee to look into a written request by the prosecutor general to lift the immunity of Deputy Ahmad Oweidi Abbadi. The prosecutor general at the Criminal Court sent the request to Majali on Tuesday asking the House to lift the immunity of Abbadi to face charges of sexual assault.

According to House regulations, cases concerning immunity of deputies are referred to

the Legal Committee, which reviews them and issues its recommendations to the House in a period not exceeding two weeks.

Abbadi could not be reached for comment yesterday. However, before attending Wednesday's session, Abbadi told the press that the allegations levelled against him were not true and said he felt that he was being "framed."

The Constitution stipulates that "senators and deputies cannot be detained or prosecuted while Parliament is in session unless an absolute

majority of the chamber to which the deputy or senator belongs finds enough evidence to detain or prosecute the member."

One deputy said that although Abbadi is not very popular among his colleagues, he did not believe the House would vote to lift his immunity.

Since 1989, the House never lifted the immunity of any deputy; it turned down two similar requests involving former deputies Yaqoub Qarash and Jamal Khreishah.

Informed sources told the

Jordan Times that the woman who has pressed charges of sexual assault against Abbadi allegedly had an affair with the deputy after he promised to marry her.

Upset by a news report carried by the Jordan News Agency, Petra, which on Tuesday said the speaker received a written request involving Abbadi's immunity from the prosecutor general, Majali told the House at the opening of yesterday's session the Petra report was "inaccurate."

(Continued on page 12)

Netanyahu to call early polls unless Knesset backs his peace policy

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced Wednesday that he will call early elections unless parliament gives its formal support Monday to his tough stance in peace negotiations with the Palestinians.

Netanyahu said he would ask his cabinet on Sunday and the Knesset, Israel's parliament, on Monday to approve five conditions for implementing further West Bank withdrawals required by the recent Wye River accord. "If the Knesset doesn't approve this on Monday, we will have to go to early

elections," he told a meeting of his right-wing Likud Party.

Netanyahu made the surprise announcement as he faced a parliamentary motion of no confidence scheduled for Monday which politicians from both the right and left said he would likely lose.

Hardline nationalist parties which theoretically have the votes in parliament to defeat Netanyahu have vowed to bring him down unless he definitively abandons the Wye River land-for-security accord.

A quick straw poll by Israel television said 65 of the Knesset's 120 MPs planned to vote against supporting his policy,

thereby ensuring early elections.

Given the likelihood he will go down in defeat one way or another in the Knesset on Monday, most politicians viewed

Wednesday's announcement not as a genuine plea for policy support but instead as the opening salvo in an election campaign.

"Since there is virtually no chance that parliament backs his motion, it is clear that on Monday we will announce early elections," said Meir Shitreet, the Likud parliamentary whip.

(Continued on page 12)

Arafat denounces Israeli suspension of pullback

GAZA CITY (AFP) — Palestinian President Yasser Arafat denounced as "dangerous" an Israeli decision Wednesday to delay a further West Bank pullback required this week under the Wye River peace accord.

But a senior official of his Palestinian National Authority (PNA) said their side would continue to honour its commitments under the Wye agreement despite Israel's backtracking.

"This is an obviously dangerous violation of the agreement and I don't think the American government or President Clinton will agree to this," Arafat said of the Israeli decision after returning from talks in Egypt with President Hosni Mubarak.

Nabil Shaath, a PNA min-

ister who was standing by Arafat's side, then denied comments by another Palestinian official who had threatened to suspend its side of the Wye agreement.

"I'd like to make it very clear, we've carried out all our commitments and we shall continue to carry out all our commitments without any limits," Shaath told reporters as Arafat listened on.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told a cabinet meeting earlier Wednesday that the PNA was still not honouring its commitments under the U.S.-brokered Wye agreement and as a result there would be no further land transfer on Friday as required by the accord.

(Continued on page 12)

JORDAN DIARY 1999

The Wye River Kingdom of Jordan

Produced by the International Press Office of the Royal Hashemite Court

Now available at bookshops in Amman, Aqaba and Petra

Big increase in Jewish settlement construction, Peace Now says

TEL AVIV (AP)—Israel has allowed the construction of housing in Jewish settlements in the West Bank to more than double, Peace Now said Wednesday, an assessment likely to further anger Palestinians already frustrated with the peace process.

There were 1,420 homes started in the settlements in the first half of 1998, the leader of the peace activist group said in a statement, 136 per cent more than in the same period last year.

In the second half of 1998, construction of 640 homes began in the settlements, 121 per cent more than in the same period of 1997, Mossi Raz said.

The figures were obtained from a report of the Israeli government's Central Bureau of Statistics, Raz said.

Only a minority of the

houses were being built by the government itself, but private construction requires government approval.

Settlers have placed mobile homes on eight new sites in the vicinity of the settlements since U.S.-brokered negotiations at Wye River, Maryland, revived the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians in October.

Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon has called on the settlers to seize the hilltops to ensure that they do not come under Palestinian control.

Peace Now said that its officials spotted 43 trailers on hilltops in a helicopter flight.

The Palestinians, who wish to establish an independent state in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, say settlement expansion violates the 1993 Oslo accords because it is a unilateral act which threatens to predetermine the final outcome of negotiations.

tions.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu maintains that expansion of the settlements is not prohibited by the Oslo accords and that the settlements should be expanded to accommodate "natural population growth."

The Palestinians accused Netanyahu this week of not being serious about the Wye accords because of his refusal to move ahead with a scheduled troop withdrawal from the West Bank and with prisoner releases.

Netanyahu says he wants to see solid evidence that the Palestinians are containing incitement and collecting illegal weapons.

Peace Now leader Raz said the trailer parks are illegal and called on the Israeli Civil Administration in the West Bank to enforce the law and evacuate the settlers with their trailers.



PALESTINIAN HOUSE DEMOLISHED IN JERUSALEM: Hafez Abu Baba at watches Wednesday as his home is demolished in an Arab east Jerusalem neighbourhood. Baba at said the Jerusalem municipality issued an order for Israeli police and border police to destroy the home, saying it was built without a permit. Baba at and two brothers along with their families totalling 35 people lived in the home. Police arrested one of Baba at's brothers while the demolition was taking place (Reuters photo)

Ecevit close to failure in bid to form Turkish government

ANKARA (R) — Turkish leftist Bülent Ecevit appeared close to failure on Wednesday in his efforts to form the country's sixth government in three years.

President Süleyman Demirel nominated Ecevit earlier this month to form an administration that could shore up an ailing economy and steer the country to an early general election next April.

But his attempts to glue together different shards of a parliament divided by personal rivalries has gone badly and successive plans have been dashed.

On Wednesday a conservative who had made up a section of Ecevit's planned government said the leftist should give up his hopes of building an administration and tell Demirel he had failed.

"Every 10 days he pulls a new government formula out of his hat... It is clear Ecevit must hand back the mandate," former Prime Minister Tansu Ciller told her deputies in parliament.

Parliamentary sources say Ecevit is likely to visit Demirel on Friday amid uncertainty over whether he plans to throw in the towel or persevere.

If Ecevit yields the mandate, Demirel must find another prime minister-designate. If, by Jan. 10, no government has been found, the president is empowered to appoint a prime minister. Ministerial posts would have to be parcelled out according to parties' parliamentary strength.

Turkish shares ended the day 6.5 per cent down on pessimism that a government would be formed in the near future.

Political instability has plagued Turkey since 1995.

Corruption charges downed the last government in November, just as signs began to emerge of a drastic slowdown of the country's economy.

The caretaker government last week announced measures designed to shield the economy and boost stagnant exports but big business has called for a stronger administration.

Turkey is also embroiled in a dispute with Italy over Kurdish rebel leader Abdullah Ocalan. An Italian court on Wednesday freed Ocalan, wanted in Turkey for treason and murder in its Kurdish Labour Party (PKK) campaign for Kurdish self-rule.

Militants in PNA jail announce hunger strike

JENIN (AFP) — Eight Islamists jailed in this Palestinian-run town announced Wednesday that they had started a hunger strike in protest at their detention and in solidarity with Palestinians imprisoned in Israel.

The eight, all members of the radical Islamic Jihad movement and the only political detainees in the Jenin jail, announced their strike in a message sent to reporters from the prison.

The militants complained they had been held without trial as part of a crackdown by the Palestinian National Authority on Islamic radicals and other opponents of peace accords with Israel.

"We call on our people to support our request for release since we have all been freed from Israeli jails and have been rearrested on orders from the Israelis," they said in their statement.

The prisoners in Israel

had been protesting against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's decision to free mostly common criminals rather than political detainees among the 750 Palestinians he agreed to release under the October Wye River peace accord.

Netanyahu has firmly refused to release the vast majority of political prisoners on the grounds they have Israeli "blood on their hands," even though a large number of the detainees were arrested prior to the Oslo peace agreements and belong to groups which signed onto the accords.

His decision sparked a wave of violent protests in the Palestinian territories which led to an Israeli decision last week to suspend a further West Bank withdrawal required by the Wye accords.

Netanyahu confirmed Wednesday that he would not order the new pullback by Friday as required by the Wye agreement, saying the Palestinians were not living up to their obligations under the accord, notably by allowing the recent protest violence.

Uproar in Israel over Clinton comparison

TEL AVIV (AP) — It was meant as a reconciliatory moment: a husky-voiced President Bill Clinton describing "profoundly emotional" meetings with Palestinian children with fathers in Israeli jails and Israeli children whose fathers were killed in the conflict with Palestinians.

Instead, the comment touched a raw nerve in Israel, triggering an outcry over what was perceived as too close a parallel drawn between the sufferings of Israeli terror victims and Palestinian attackers.

The uproar, which clearly caught the Americans by surprise, illustrates how even someone who knows the Mideast minefield as well as Clinton does can easily make a misstep.

On both sides, certain topics — and the code words for them — are so emotionally freighted that the simplest and most well-

meaning observation can ignite a firestorm.

"I thought it was a very powerful way of making a point that people here have suffered on both sides," Clinton's national security adviser, Sandy Berger, told reporters in response to the Israeli criticism.

The incident occurred as Clinton appealed for Israel and the Palestinians to press ahead with the land-for-security accord signed Oct. 23 in Washington.

Addressing a historic session of the Palestinians' parliament-in-exile in Gaza City on Monday, he described separate meetings with Palestinian children whose fathers were imprisoned for anti-Israeli activity and Israeli youngsters whose fathers had been killed.

"These children brought tears to my eyes," Clinton said, his voice nearly cracking. "We have to find a way for both sets

of children to get their lives back and to go forward."

Within hours, Israelis from across the political spectrum were voicing objections. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's assessment — though subdued compared to his broadsides of recent days — was nonetheless a rebuke.

"I don't know what the president meant by it, but it came out as though there's a comparison between the suffering of the children of the murderers and the children of those who were murdered," the prime minister said at a news conference.

Even former Prime Minister Shimon Peres, a strong supporter of Clinton and the peace process, said the president had "slipped up... He made a mistake in the comparison."

Press commentary reflected the widely held Israeli view that outsiders simply do not understand what it is like to live in a

country burdened by the daily threat of suicide bombings and other attacks aimed at civilians.

Clinton's "equation of children whose parents are in Israeli prisons and children who lost their parents in acts of terror is unjust," commentator Nahum Barnea, whose son died in a bus bombing nearly three years ago, wrote in Tuesday's editions of the Yediot daily. "Clinton is too intelligent not to know that not all tears are equal."

Outside Clinton's hotel, relatives of the victims of Palestinian attacks staged a protest Tuesday to denounce the remarks. West Bank settler Yoel Tzur, whose wife and son were killed in a shooting near the town of Ramallah two years ago, said the comparison reflected a "lack of balance."

In talking about how the Israeli and Palestinian children affected him, Clinton might

have thought he was making a point about common experience that few would quarrel with — especially his conclusion that "neither side has a monopoly on pain or virtue." In fact, throughout decades of conflict, both Israel and the Palestinians have always resisted acknowledging the other's suffering. Many Palestinians speak slightly of the Holocaust; Israel this year celebrated the 50th anniversary of its independence with little mention that their new state spawned hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees.

For their part, the Palestinians see anyone jailed in the struggle against the 30-year Israeli military occupation — even those who carried out killings — as a fighter for the national cause, not a criminal. Hardly a Palestinian family has not had a relative jailed at some point during the Israeli occupation.

Iran reformers say killings could spark crackdown

TEHRAN (R) — Reformers backing Iranian President Mohammad Khatami cautioned on Wednesday that recent political murders could provide a pretext for a hardline crackdown, as the government told writers it was doing all it could to end the killings.

Officials have announced several arrests in connection with the murders that have so far claimed at least three secularist writers and two political dissidents, but the failure to provide details or to identify the alleged killers has raised

deep suspicions among pro-Khatami forces.

The new Islamic Iran Participation Front, founded this month by key pro-Khatami figures, challenged the conservative-run judiciary and security services to find the killers.

The group did not overtly question the official view, expressed by Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, that the murders were tied to hostile foreign powers out to undermine the Islamic republic. But it said conservatives

were exploiting the resultant fear and uncertainty for their own political aims.

"The mysterious role of some dogmatic and totalitarian media, who have directed their explicit attacks at the president... indicates a calculated plan for the suppression of civil liberties and creation of an atmosphere of panic," the front said in a statement published on Wednesday.

A coalition of moderate student groups demanded to know why the murders of figures associated with the conservatives, such as former prison chief Assadollah

Lajevardi, were resolved quickly while officials appeared at a loss to halt the killing of dissident secularists.

Some moderates have expressed concern that the spate of killings could be part of a campaign by conservatives opposed to Khatami's liberal reforms to undermine his government.

But top conservative figures reiterated on Wednesday that only enemies, including Israel and the United States, could benefit from a terror campaign hurting Iran's national security.

JORDAN TELEVISION

Tel. 4773111-19
PROGRAMME TWO
Thursday Programmes

15:10 Cartoon — Superman
15:30 Science fiction — Space Precinct
16:30 Doc. — Science Show
17:00 French Programme
18:15 Drama — Sparks
19:00 Le Journal
19:15 French Programme
19:30 News Headlines
19:35 Comedy — Family Matters
20:00 Doc. — Museums of the World
20:30 Drama — Dr. Quinn the Medicine Woman
21:10 Oprah Winfrey Show
22:00 News in English
22:30 Feature film — "Percy and Thunder"
23:59 Comedy — Daily
00:30 End of T.X.

Friday Programmes

15:10 Cartoon — The Hunchback of Notre Dame
15:30 Doc. — Treasure Hunt
16:30 Feature film
18:00 The Simpsons
19:00 Le Journal
19:15 French Programme
19:30 News Headlines
19:35 Comedy — The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air
20:00 Cinema, Cinema
20:30 Drama — "Babylon - 5"
21:15 Doc. — Every Man
22:00 News in English
22:30 Drama — The X-Files
23:10 Drama — The Preppie Murder
23:59 End of T.X.

PRAYER TIMES

05:02 Fajr
06:24 (Sunrise) Duha

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

11:32 Dhuhur
14:16 Asr
16:39 Maghreb
18:01 Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church
Sweith, Tel. 5920740
Assemblies of God Church Tel. 4632785

St. Joseph Church Tel. 4624590
Terra Sancta Church Tel. 4622366
Anglican Church Tel. 4624853/4624811

St. Afrem Syrian Orthodox Church Tel. 4771751
Armenian International Church Tel. 5865897
German-speaking Evangelical Congregation Tel. 5688404

The Evangelical Local Church in Amman Tel. 5811295
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Tel. 4654932

St. John the Baptist at De la Salle College Tel. 5661757
Church of the Annunciation Tel. 4637440

Greek Orthodox Church Tel. 4646138
Church of Presentation, Sweith Tel. 5920146

The Uniate Catholic Church Tel. 4624757
The English-Language Catholic Parish Tel. 4614190

Evangelical Free Church Tel. 4892679
The Baptist Church Tel. 4628052

The Armenian Catholic Church Tel. 4771331

The Armenian Orthodox Church Tel. 4775261

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology
Relative cold weather conditions will prevail and skies cloudy to partly cloudy. Scattered showers are expected in the northern and central parts of the Kingdom, and winds southwesterly moderate. In Aqaba, it will be moderate, winds northerly moderate, and seas calm.

Amman05/14
Aqaba10/21
Deserts03/17
Jordan Valley10/22

Yesterday's high temperatures:
Amman 15, Aqaba 20
Humidity readings: Amman 51 per cent, Aqaba 44 per cent.

Following are the temperatures expected today in the following areas:

Ajloun04/10
Jerash10/16
Um Qays08/15
Madaba05/13
Petra04/15
Dead Sea12/23

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

NIGHT DUTY

AMMAN:
Dr. Youssef Nasser4751144
Dr. Hanna Mansour4750197

AMMAN:
Dr. Nidal Dabbeh5827195
Dr. Youssef Nasser4751144
Dr. Hanna Mansour4750197

AMMAN:
Dr. Nidal Dabbeh5827195
Dr. Youssef Nasser4751144
Dr. Hanna Mansour4750197

AMMAN:
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Dr. Youssef Nasser4751144
Dr. Hanna Mansour4750197

AMMAN:
Dr. Nidal Dabbeh5827195
Dr. Youssef Nasser4751144
Dr. Hanna Mansour4750197

Shukri4898863
Dr. Nidal Dabbeh5827195
Dr. Youssef Nasser4751144
Dr. Hanna Mansour4750197

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Al Salam Pharmacy 4636730
Mayadah Pharmacy 5537034
Rukn Al Dawa Pharmacy 5536169

IRBID:
Dr. Issam Salih021246858
Fou'ad Pharmacy (02)275362

ZARQA:
Dr. Rafiq Atallah09494424
Palestine Pharmacy (09)983562

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre4637111
Civil Defence Department 5661111
Civil Defence Immediate Rescue4630341
Civil Defence Emergency199
Rescue Police 192, 4621111, 4637777
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Water Authority5680100
J. Electricity Authority 5815615
Electric Power Co.4636381
RJ Flight Information 44-53200
Queen Alia Int'l. Airport44-53200

AMMAN:
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The Islamic, Abdil5661317
Hussein Medical Centre 5856856
Luzmila4630195
Khalidi Maternity4642816
Akileh Maternity4642412
Jabal Amman Maternity 4642362
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Palestine, Shmeisani5607071
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Al-Mushar Hospital 56672279
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Italian, Al-Muhajreen 47771013
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Army, Marka489161115
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Al Anfal Cancer Centre 5353000

ZARQA:
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Ibn Sina Hospital (09)986731
Al Hikma Modern Hospital (09)990990

IRBID:
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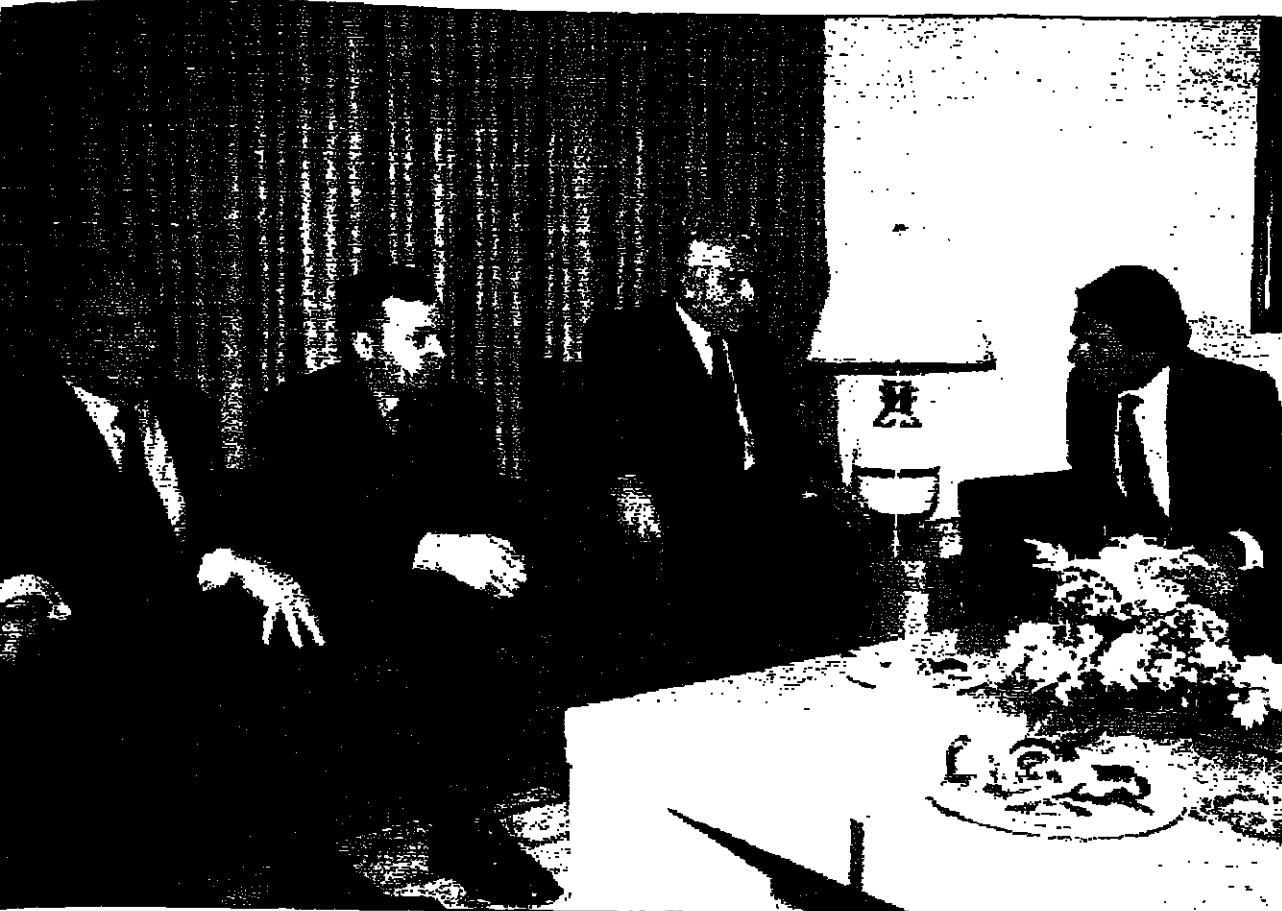
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Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar (right) speaks with the Bosnian three-men presidency represented by Bosnian-Serb Zivko Radisic (second right) and his copresidents, Bosnian-Muslim Alija Izetbegovic (left) and Bosnian-Croat Ante Jelavic prior to the start of the International Conference on Bosnia-Herzegovina in Madrid (AFP photo)

Adopted blueprint urges lasting Bosnia peace

MADRID (R) — More than 40 countries sponsoring efforts to rebuild Bosnia adopted a sweeping plan Wednesday, calling on the leaders of the war-torn Balkan nation to take urgent action to achieve a lasting peace.

The Peace Implementation Council, meeting for the third time since the end of the 1992-95 Bosnian war, issued a detailed blueprint designed to bridge the country's ethnic divide after the conflict involving its Muslim, Serb and Croat communities.

Delegates urged Bosnia leaders to stick to their commitments under the U.S.-brokered 1995 Dayton peace accord requiring them to allow the return of hundreds of thousands of refugees and help in the arrest of indicted war criminals.

They also warned that reconstruction efforts could collapse unless the Bosnian government undertook drastic economic reforms to reduce the country's dependence on

massive international assistance.

"A lasting peace within Bosnia and Herzegovina is starting to take root," the council said in its final declaration. "But there is still much work to be done."

The two-day conference took place against the backdrop of renewed ethnic bloodshed in neighbouring Serbia's troubled Kosovo province.

More than 40 people were killed Monday in the worst violence in Kosovo since Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic, under the threat of NATO air strikes, agreed in October to end a bloody crackdown by Yugoslav security forces against ethnic Albanian separatists.

While Kosovo was not listed on the official agenda, the simmering conflict which has killed about 1,500 people and created 250,000 refugees cast a shadow over the conference.

In Madrid, the council — made up of the United States and other Western

powers plus countries from Africa and Asia — approved measures aimed at pushing the Bosnian peace process forward.

Delegates urged Bosnian leaders to do more to get war refugees back to their homes and provide them protection.

Three years after the war ended, some 860,000 people remain displaced in Bosnia, many of them too afraid to return.

The council, made up of foreign ministers or their deputies, also warned Bosnian leaders that they must learn to survive on their own after a \$5.1 billion international aid package runs out next year.

"Bosnia and Herzegovina must use the time that remains to prepare for life without total reliance on foreign aid and to face up to the challenge of transforming the economy," the final declaration said.

But, even while calling on Bosnia to assume greater responsibility for its own affairs, donor countries made clear that the

international community must stay involved in the Balkan country for some time to come.

The conference took place amid growing Western frustration with leaders of Bosnia's main ethnic factions over delays in free-market reforms and the failure to clean up corruption and clamp down on criminal gangs.

Much of the progress achieved so far, including the introduction of a common currency and a car licence plate, had to be imposed by Western peace coordinator Carlos Westendorp.

Apart from financial aid, some 32,000 troops of the NATO-led Stabilisation Force (SFOR) help secure inter-ethnic peace.

NATO Secretary General Javier Solana said defence ministers had decided that SFOR troop levels should not be significantly changed for now. "There will, however, be small reductions in size that will not affect capabilities," he said.

Chechenya declares emergency over rebel warlords

GROZNY, Russia (R) — Chechens awoke Wednesday to a state of emergency in the break-away Russian region, but there were no signs of any increased security in the capital Grozny.

Parliament declared the 30-day state of emergency Tuesday to take effect overnight in response to a wave of lawlessness that culminated with the beheading of four Western hostages last week.

A Reuters correspondent on the spot said there were no additional checkpoints or military on the streets.

President Aslan Maskhadov appealed to Chechens in a televised address to gather in Grozny

Thursday morning at a mass meeting to protest the violent activities of warlords he accuses of leading the kidnapping ring.

Maskhadov, seen as a relative moderate, is facing a challenge to his authority from renegade guerrillas who call for a tougher line towards Moscow and stricter Islamic rule.

Tuesday, he said, he wanted the Chechen people to give him firm backing for his plans to clamp down on the warlords, who he said were based in various areas of the mountainous Caucasus republic.

He said they were bent on fomenting Afghan-style chaos in Chechenya.

Chechenya has been virtu-

ally lawless since its 1994-96 war for secession from Russia. Moscow withdrew its troops and now exercises no influence in the region, but no state has recognised Chechenya's independence.

Three Britons and a New Zealander taken hostage in Grozny in October were beheaded last week. The men, telephone engineers, were installing a mobile phone system in Grozny.

Another Western hostage, French aid worker Vincent Cochetel, was freed unharmed from a nearby region by Russian commandos in a raid Saturday morning.

Maskhadov called another mobilisation and state of emergency in July and August this year, but the moves did not lead to any major arrests or military operations by his forces.

crime wave. But it was not clear what precise effect the mobilisation or the state of emergency would have in a region where almost the entire male population is already armed.

Russia's Nationalities Minister Ramazan Abdulatipov told Interfax news agency that the declaration of a state of emergency meant little, because Chechenya has already been in a de facto state of emergency since the war ended in 1996.

Maskhadov called another mobilisation and state of emergency in July and August this year, but the moves did not lead to any major arrests or military operations by his forces.

Police fire tear gas at stone-throwing protesters, dozens arrested

JAKARTA (AP) — Police fired tear gas and used batons to beat protesting students who threw rocks at soldiers near Jakarta's presidential palace Wednesday.

Hundreds of students in three groups tried separately to march on the ornate white-columned mansion, but were blocked by security personnel.

At least three students were hospitalized and dozens were arrested. Some were bleeding as they were dragged into military trucks and taken away, witnesses said.

The protest took place even though President B.J. Habibie was in Hanoi attending a meeting of the Association of South East Asian Nations.

Police fired tear gas and hit the members of one group after they threw rocks near the defence ministry headquarters about 400 metres from the palace.

Some students smashed

street lamps and street signs and overturned large ornamental potted plants on the roadside.

One witness said police fired tear gas canisters when the students refused to disperse.

The protesters, from several universities, had demanded that Indonesia's powerful military get out of politics.

They also wanted ex-President Suharto to be put on trial for corruption.

A wave of student protests and riots forced Suharto to quit in May after 32 years of autocratic rule.

Graft allegations against him are now being investigated by state lawyers. But he has not been charged. Suharto has denied any wrongdoing.

Wednesday's violence was the latest in a series of clashes between students and security forces in recent weeks as political turmoil in the world's fourth most pop-

ulous nation continues to boil.

On Nov. 13 security forces opened fire and shot nine students to death when thousands of protesters tried to march on to the parliament.

Earlier Wednesday soldiers and police in anti-riot gear blocked another group of 150 students from marching to the palace.

Security personnel placed razor wire on a street behind the building.

Four armoured vehicles were moved into position and six military trucks unloaded guards equipped with shields and batons.

A banner unfurled by the students said: "Put Suharto on trial. Form a new government." The students also repeatedly chanted "reform or revolution." Later several hundred students congregated near the heavily guarded National Monument in a park adjacent to the palace. But they were corralled by

security forces.

In another part of Jakarta, about 500 students shook the wrought-iron gates of Indonesia's attorney general's office demanding that Suharto be taken to court immediately.

Some students threw garbage at police guarding the building.

But officers did not respond.

The office is in charge of investigating Suharto.

Last week state prosecutors questioned the 77-year-old ex-leader about his wealth.

State lawyers quizzed Suharto soon after his resignation six months ago, but said they failed to find any evidence against him.

Habibie, Suharto's successor, ordered a new investigation to be launched amid accusations that the initial probe had been too soft.

U.N. launches \$115m appeal for Afghanistan

ISLAMABAD (AFP) — The United Nations Wednesday launched a \$115 million appeal for Afghanistan to save lives, ensure human rights and build sustainable livelihoods in the war-ravaged country, U.N. officials said.

The consolidated appeal reflects a "new unified approach" to aid activities in Afghanistan, they said, adding it was endorsed by a donors meeting in Tokyo last week.

Bronek Szymski, acting U.N. coordinator for Afghanistan, told reporters here the appeal this year was 20-30 per cent less than the request for funds the U.N. had made last year. However, he stressed "for the first time" the appeal emphasised respect for human rights in Afghanistan.

U.N. sources said response to consolidated appeals had declined over the past three years.

Reasons cited by the donors included the continued conflict in the country, widespread gender discrimination, violations of human rights and interference of the Afghan authorities in the operation of aid agencies, they said.

The headline Taliban Islamic militia, after seizing the capital of Kabul two years ago, banned employment and education for women in the more than two-thirds of Afghanistan under its control.

U.N. sources said the

last appeal had asked for \$157 million and by Nov. 28 around \$53 million, or 34 per cent of the total, had been pledged.

A U.N. statement said the funding this year had been requested for "top priority projects" including demining, preventive health care, community-based development projects and emergency food aid.

The U.N. agencies acknowledged that while peace continued to elude the people of Afghanistan, where war has now entered its 20th year, "progress has been made which requires continued international support to sustain."

The U.N. and other international agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have "saved millions of lives threatened by poverty, war and natural disaster by supplying food, medical assistance and shelter," it said.

Two major earthquakes in northern Afghanistan this year, as well as flooding and internal military blockades, prompted multi-agency emergency operations.

While increased fighting created new refugees and displacement, poor harvests and impenetrable front lines put "hundreds of thousands at risk extreme hunger," it said.

Aid groups this year helped Afghans to rebuild Kabul's sanitation system and to

reconstruct and rehabilitate hospitals, schools, agricultural systems and roads around the country.

The United Nations' mine action programme in Afghanistan, "the largest in the world," is clearing land and housing for rehabilitation and the return of refugees.

International agencies have also worked "to ensure the protection of human rights and gender equality as Afghans knit their societies together again," it said.

"The international community must remain engaged in these activities, not only to save lives but to assist Afghans to build a sustainable future," U.N. humanitarian coordinator Erick de Mull said in a statement.

"We are also working to prevent future crises, to promote and protect human rights and to help the Afghans to help themselves."

Aid programmes have continued despite the withdrawal of most international workers from Afghanistan since U.S. cruise missile strikes on alleged terrorist Osama Ben Laden's headquarters in the country in August. U.N. sources said negotiations were underway with Taliban authorities on creating a "secure environment" for the return of all staff.

India's nuclear deterrent a matter of policy, not numbers

NEW DELHI (AP) — India's prime minister refused Wednesday to detail his nuclear capabilities, but said they constituted the minimum necessary defence.

Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's speech to the upper house of parliament Wednesday reiterated much of what he said a day before in the lower house to update lawmakers on his negotiations with the United States over India's nuclear arsenal.

Wednesday, he noted lawmakers had pressed him to elaborate on what he called India's "minimum credible deterrent" to threats believed posed by neighbours China and Pakistan.

"It is not a question of numbers, but of a policy approach," he said.

Vajpayee said India needs no more tests after exploding nuclear devices under its western desert in May. The focus now is on missiles to deliver nuclear warheads. Vajpayee said work on extending the range of India's Agni missile was continuing.

The United States is pushing India to adopt limitations on missile development, as well as sign onto the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and ban production of fissile material. Six rounds of U.S.-Indian talks have been held since May, and a seventh is scheduled in late January.

The two countries launched negotiations after Washington slapped economic sanctions on New Delhi for its series of nuclear weapons tests in May.

Neighbouring Pakistan, in response to arch-rival India, conducted its own nuclear tests and it too is now under sanctions.

Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh, Vajpayee's envoy in the U.S. talks, was quoted by local news agencies as adding in an address to parliament Wednesday that nuclear powers such as the "sanctions crazy" United States demonstrated "astonishing and unacceptable arrogance" in preaching to India the opposite of what they practised.

Washington lifted some sanctions this month after India and Pakistan announced a moratorium on further testing and promised to adhere to an international test ban treaty by September, as well as to control the production and sale of nuclear materials.

Aside from the long-range Agni still under development, India also has a force of 20-30 nuclear-capable medium-range Prithvi missiles, according to the London defence journal Jane's Intelligence Review.

Banana under house arrest, complains of 'political assassination'

HARARE (AFP) — Former president and convicted sex-criminal Canaan Banana, who was placed under house arrest Wednesday after returning to Zimbabwe, claimed he had been subjected to "political assassination."

The former head of state told reporters after a court appearance that he had fled the country in mid-November "because I was in possession of dangerous information, so I had to share it with my real friends."

"My political assassins have been more

brutal than Brutus," he said, refusing further comment.

The 62-year-old Methodist clergyman, who was Zimbabwe's head of state from 1980-1987, met with two southern African presidents after jumping bail: Botswana's Festus Mogae and South Africa's Nelson Mandela.

But Wednesday he was back in the dock at Harare's High Court, where he was convicted in absentia last month on 10 charges involving sodomy and indecent assault and one count of common assault.

Judge President

Godfrey Chidyauku ordered that he remain at his luxurious suburban home in Harare under police guard until the next court hearing on Dec. 23.

Banana arrived from South Africa at the Beitbridge border post in a chauffeur-driven Mercedes Benz late Tuesday and was then escorted by a team of detectives to the capital Harare.

Legal sources suggest his surprise return may have been prompted by assurances that he will not serve a term in Zimbabwe's jails, which are notorious for homosexual assault

and AIDS among prisoners.

They point out that President Robert Mugabe has the power to pardon his predecessor, or vary any sentence imposed by the court.

Mugabe discussed the case of the fugitive former president with Mandela at a meeting in Harare Sunday, and the two men said they had reached a "common position," but refused to give details.

Lawyers suggest that those talks led to Banana's return. He was convicted in absentia on Nov. 26 of using his position as

president to force his sexual attentions on male aides, bodyguards, a cook and a gardener.

While Mugabe is internationally known for his hatred of homosexuals, whom he has described as "pigs," there have been signals in government-controlled media that he may be prepared to be lenient with Banana.

A rare front-page editorial in the main state-run daily, the Herald, said Friday last week that Zimbabweans should "extend the hand of understanding to Reverend Banana, ask him to come back

home and be one of us."

In an apparent reference to former Prime Minister Ian Smith and whites who fought against black majority rule in Zimbabwe, the Herald said "we have, after all, forgiven worse monsters."

The paper said there were many reasons to forgive Banana, including the fact that he had "made sacrifices for the liberation of this country."

State prosecutors told reporters after the court hearing Wednesday that under normal circumstances, Banana would face fur-

ther charges for having skipped the country illegally, but said "this is up to the police."

It is still unclear how the white-haired Banana, dressed Wednesday in his trademark Mao-style suit, managed to travel to both Botswana and South Africa without his passport, which had been surrendered to the state as part of his bail conditions.

The hearing on Dec. 23 is expected to concentrate on arguments from the prosecution and defence on the question of sentence for the sex-crime charges.

Death toll in Rome building collapse rises

ROME (R) — At least 13 people died and about 20 were missing after a five-storey Rome apartment block collapsed early Wednesday as its occupants slept.

"There are 13 dead, 10 of them adults," Luigi Abete, head of the fire brigades squad at the scene, told reporters.

He said he held out little hope of any survivors being found, adding that he feared the final death toll could be between 30 and 35.

"Hope is the last thing to die but I don't think that we will find anybody alive," he said nearly 12 hours after the collapse of the building which was home to 16 families in the Italian capital's southwestern district of Portuense.

The collapse occurred at around 3 a.m. (0200 GMT) when most residents would have been in beds. It was first thought to have been caused by a gas explosion but fire chiefs said later that subsidence or structural faults were more likely to blame.

The block, built in the

1950s, also contained offices and had a print shop in the basement.

Abete said he believed rescue workers would have to dig for at least two more days before they reached the bottom of the rubble, which filled the building's basement and rose little more than a metre (three feet) above street level.

"What residents heard was a big thump, not an explosion, but something like distant thunder," Abete said.

Politicians and priests arrived to pay their respects. "This is an enormous, incomprehensible tragedy, especially coming in the period before Christmas," said Interior Minister Rosa Russo Iervolino.

Many relatives and friends converged on the scene, seeking news of victims. They were comforted by neighbours from three nearby blocks who were awakened by the noise and had joined in the frantic hunt for survivors.

"Which building is it? Where is it? Oh God, my sister is in there," cried one



Firefighters search through the debris of a five-storey apartment block that collapsed early Dec. 16 in Rome (AFP photo)

grief-stricken woman.

A young firefighter collapsed in shock when his parents and one of his brothers were found among the victims.

The dead were carried on stretchers to a nearby garage for identification.

During his weekly general audience at the Vatican, Pope John Paul said he was "deeply saddened" by the news and expressed his

condolences to the families of the victims. Italy's upper house of parliament held a minute's silence for the victims.

The Italian soccer federation said a minute's silence would be called ahead of an Italy vs. Rest of the World match at Rome's Olympic stadium at 9 p.m. (2000 GMT) Wednesday.

Fire service inspector general Salvatore Fiadini

said the building looked as if it had been swallowed up by the ground and the collapse could have been triggered by a landslide.

"I have never seen anything like this before because usually when a building collapses some part of the structure remains standing," he said. "This is a complete levelling."

"The surprising thing is that the volume of the rub-

ble is so low. So much has appeared to have gone underground," said civil protection chief Franco Barberi. "The chances of finding anyone alive is remote."

Some residents who have lived in the district for years said they had heard that the area had once been mined for a substance known as "pozzolana" — volcanic ash used in making cement.

Schroeder heads to eastern Germany to learn region's problems.

DRESDEN, Germany

(AP) — Chancellor Gerhard Schröder headed with most of his cabinet to the former Communist east Wednesday to show solidarity with the economically troubled region.

Since taking office in October, Schröder has been eager to dispel critics' charges that he had taken little interest in eastern Germany's problems — high unemployment tops the list — since unification in 1990.

Now he is launching a series of regular talks with eastern governors by meeting Saxony's Kurt Biedenkopf, whose area leads the four other eastern states in closing the economic gap with richer western Germany.

To add weight to the effort, most Cabinet mem-

bers are accompanying Schröder for the afternoon meeting in the state capital Dresden.

The chancellor promised in his inaugural address last month to hold special Cabinet sessions in the east every two months.

He has also appointed a minister for eastern German affairs, and has promised to continue massive doses of government aid.

Schröder's bid to reach out to eastern Germans, who make up about a fifth of the population, is part of a historic eastward shift of the nation's centre of gravity brought on by unification.

Next fall, with the government's move from Bonn in the west, Schröder will be governing a united Germany from Berlin for the first

time since the Nazi defeat in World War II.

Eastern Germans helped lift Schröder and his Social Democrats into power by turning against Helmut Kohl in September elections, their gratitude for the chancellor who unified Germany worn out.

But a poll published last week by the Leipziger Volkszeitung newspaper showed barely half of all easterners think the 7-week-old centre-left government is doing a good job.

Topics for Wednesday's talks include Saxony's economic situation and ways to put young people to work, the future of government aid to the east and the continuing cleanup of polluted industrial sites left over from Communist times.

Swiss president in Moscow for talks with Russian leaders

MOSCOW (AFP) — Swiss President Flavio Cotti arrived here Wednesday for meetings with top Russian officials, including President Boris Yeltsin and Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov.

Cotti, accompanied by his wife Renata, arrived from Saint Petersburg, where he had attended a roundtable of Swiss and Russian businessmen.

The Kremlin said Cotti would Thursday meet Yeltsin, who is making a slow recovery from a bout of pneumonia. Yeltsin, 67, returned to the Kremlin Tuesday from his country residence for a protocol meeting with foreign envoys.

The Russian leader was hospitalised on Nov. 22 and has been dogged by ill-health since undergoing a quintuple heart bypass operation in November 1996.

During the first day of his two-day visit, Cotti was

expected to give assurances that Swiss investors are still interested in the Russian market despite the current crisis.

As well as the president and premier, Cotti is to have talks with Moscow mayor Yuri Luzhkov, one of the most serious candidates for the presidential elections due in 2000.

In an interview with the newspaper Nezavisimaya Gazeta, Cotti said he did not expect immediate results from his visit, which was "rather aimed at creating a spirit of long-term cooperation and mutual trust."

"This trust already exists. And by saying this I particularly think of Yevgeny Primakov," he said.

"We have long worked together when we both were foreign ministers and I am very happy to see him again and discuss many things with him, including the big problems Russia is facing up to."

Cotti said he was satisfied with the state of cooperation between the two countries.

"We Swiss believe in Russia's huge economic potential," he said. "Our industries are definitely interested in the Russian market and they are currently among the principal investors in the world."

Cotti also expressed support for political, economic and social changes in Russia to strengthen democracy and the market economy.

There will be no large-scale security in Europe "if one of Europe's principal powers, Russia, is not involved in the process," he added.

Several documents are due to be signed during Cotti's visit, Interfax said.

According to Russian figures, Switzerland was the second biggest foreign investor in Russia after the United States in 1997, at \$1.32 billion.

Death toll from S. African storm put at 18

UMTATA, South Africa (R)

— The death toll from a freak tornado which tore through the southeastern South African town of Umtata during a visit by President Nelson Mandela has risen to 18, police said Wednesday.

Rescue workers discovered a body under rubble Wednesday and police spokesman Mzukifi Fatyela said two people died in Umtata General Hospital during the night from injuries suffered when the storm hit Tuesday afternoon.

He said 163 injured were being treated in the hospital.

Local reporter Stan Mzimba said the small farming town looked like a battle zone after the tornado swept through around 3 p.m. Tuesday.

"Half of the hospital's roof was blown off and the casualty department, intensive care unit and maternity ward are damaged," he told Reuters. He added that the injured were being treated in the undamaged section of the hospital.

Fatyela said initial estimates put the cost of the damage at more than one billion rand (\$165 million).

Presidential spokeswoman Priscilla Naidoo said Mandela, who is holidaying

at his birthplace in nearby Qunu, returned to the town Wednesday to view the damage. He had been at a pharmacy in Umtata when the tornado struck.

Witnesses said his bodyguards appeared confused by the noise and threw the 80-year-old president to the ground and lay on top of him until it was clear what was happening.

After that, Mandela was taken to a room in the store and later to the town's police station.

Local officials said Mandela was expected to visit the town again later Wednesday with provincial Premier Mkhensisi Stofile.

Seven street hawkers were killed when the wall of a store collapsed on them and others were killed by flying debris and by lightning.

Mzimba said municipal workers began clearing the rubble Wednesday, using forklift trucks and bulldozers. "It's quite calm now with people just passing by and stopping briefly, whereas yesterday the police struggled to control the crowd," he said.

He said police, soldiers and security guards were guarding the damaged stores. Four youths were arrested Wednesday for looting.

Lott could face tough choice with impeachment trial

WASHINGTON (AP) —

The growing possibility that the House will impeach President Bill Clinton means Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott may ultimately have to risk the wrath of conservatives and decide whether to short-circuit a Senate trial.

The Mississippi Republican has already said that should the House of Representatives vote to impeach Clinton, the Senate would hold a trial to decide whether he should be removed from office. The House impeachment vote is expected to occur soon.

A Senate trial would probably begin no earlier than January.

With Republicans holding a 55-45 edge in the Senate, it currently seems unlikely that there will be the constitutionally required two-thirds majority — 67 votes — to oust Clinton.

If Lott concludes that Clinton will not be convicted and if the trial threatens to last months and obscure the Republican legislative agenda, Republican leaders may have to decide whether to let the proceedings continue or pursue a lesser punishment like censure.

The peril for Lott is that he has already drawn the ire of conservatives several times in his two-and-a-half years as majority leader. Being blamed by them for letting Clinton slip off the Senate's hook could be a fatal blow to his ability to continue to lead Republican senators.

"The overwhelming consensus among conservatives is to not go for censure," said Tom Katina, executive director of the American Conservative Union.

"He's going to have a rebellion in his own caucus if he were to try to cut it short here. That didn't happen on the House side."

Conservative Sen. Jon Kyl, an Arizona Republican, said shortening the proceedings if the 67 votes fail to materialise is "a horrible idea."

"You don't decide that because trying people takes time and costs the citizenry money, you don't do it. There are very few things more important in this country than upholding the rule of law," he said.

Lott has said he believes a trial could last several days or weeks, and Kyl agrees. But some members of both parties say it could last many months, thanks to the vagueness of the Senate's little-used impeachment rules.

Should that occur, some Republicans are sure to worry if their plans for tax cuts, Social Security, health care and education fade into the background. Last Election Day, many Republicans attributed their party's poor showing to their lack of a positive, assertive legislative message.

On the other hand, an impeachment trial need not drag on indefinitely. At any point, a senator can move that the trial be terminated. It would take only 51 votes — a simple majority — for that to occur. Some argue that if there are insufficient Senate votes for conviction, it would also be in the administration's interests for a quick trial and early vote.

Spokesman John Czwartacki said Lott will not comment further on a Senate trial until the House completes its work.

But Senate Majority Whip Don Nickles of Oklahoma, the Senate's

No. 2 Republican, said he has thought a lot about what to do if it becomes apparent that Clinton will not be convicted.

While declining to discuss specifics, he made clear that he believes a lengthy trial would not serve Republican purposes.

"You'd think the managers of the trial would think, 'Do we help ourselves by going on for three months or not?' It probably wouldn't," said Nickles, one of the Senate's leading conservatives, in an interview Tuesday.

But cutting a trial short would leave conservatives with feelings "that would range between ambivalence and fierce opposition," said Ralph Reed, the consultant and one-time executive director of the Christian Coalition.

Lott cannot afford that. His tenure as majority leader has already seen him clash occasionally with conservatives over issues ranging from his support of the administration's chemical weapons treaty to the \$520 billion, pork-filled spending bill Congress approved before adjourning in October.

NEWS IN BRIEF

'Australia combating racism'

CANBERRA (AFP) — An anti-racism campaign launched by the government in response to the rise of extremist groups had been a huge success, Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock said Wednesday. Ethnic groups had complained that Asians and Aborigines were being made scapegoats by Pauline Hanson and her far-right One Nation party and the government was not doing enough to help. But Ruddock told a Press Club function here that since the campaign was launched in July fears had diminished. "Earlier this year I embarked on an information campaign aimed at correcting some of the myths and misinformation surrounding the immigration debate," he said. "I took the campaign around the country to every state and territory. It was well received everywhere as a positive step towards rebutting the divisive and intolerant views then being propounded by a few prospective, and now failed, politicians." He called for Australians to join together on March 21 next year to celebrate "Harmony Day". "It will be an expression of community harmony and acceptance of our cultural diversity by the Australian people," he said. "There will always be people who will try to undermine the harmony of the Australian community, but they will not succeed because the Australian spirit has an instinct for acceptance and goodwill which has always survived, and which will take us confidently into the next century." One Nation scored eight percent of the vote, or one million people, in October elections but Hanson lost her Senate seat. The party won just one parliamentary seat.

Former Albanian president summoned on coup charge

TIRANA (AFP) — Former Albanian president Sali Berisha has been summoned by the Tirana district prosecutor to face indictment Friday over a bid by his supporters to overthrow the government, a statement by the prosecutor said Wednesday. Berisha, who heads the opposition Democratic party (PD), is accused of "fomenting a coup" on Sept. 14 in which four people were killed and 80 were injured in Tirana, when his supporters tried to storm the seat of government, prosecution spokesman Ardian Visha told reporters. Berisha condemned the procedure, describing it as an act of "revenge against the opposition." PD spokesman Arta Sakja said. The prosecutor has the right either to arrest Berisha or to leave him free until a possible trial, a legal expert who requested anonymity said. If the indictment for inciting a coup is sustained, the former Albanian president could face the death penalty. On Sept. 18, the Albanian parliament lifted Berisha's parliamentary immunity, paving the way for his arrest and prosecution on the charge of leading an attempted coup by inciting violent anti-government protests in Tirana. The anti-government violence erupted after the murder of a PD official and deputy, Azem Hajdari. Berisha and other PD officials have refused so far to attend court as witnesses for the assassination of Hajdari, who was killed by unknown gunmen on Sept. 12 in front of the PD offices. The party has called on its supporters to hold a protest demonstration in Tirana Thursday, against "political crime and terror committed by the (Socialist Party) regime against the opposition."

Le Pen purges rivals far-right

PARIS (R) — Embattled French far-right leader Jean-Marie Le Pen Wednesday purged 14 regional party leaders who sided with his rebel deputy Bruno Megret in a bid to oust him. The Front press office, firmly in the hands of Le Pen loyalists, issued a list of the sacked rebels and their replacements. Another party statement said the rebels' call for an extraordinary party congress, which could vote Le Pen out of his office as party chairman, was "a subversive operation which National Front members cannot accept." The Front split in two this month over preparations for next June's European Parliament elections, and latest public opinion surveys say its usual 15 per cent of the vote could be slashed in half because of the feud. Le Pen, who barred ringleaders of the rebellion from a party strategy session Monday, has declared them expelled from the anti-immigrant movement he founded 25 years ago. Among the regional leaders replaced were Serge Martinez, the first rebel to call for a congress, the Paris region leader Jean-Yves Le Gallou and Megret ally Frank Timmermans.

Chernobyl reactor shut down for repairs

KIEV (AP) — The only operational reactor at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant was shut for lengthy repairs that have been delayed because of energy shortages, officials said Wednesday. Reactor No. 3 was stopped late Tuesday and is expected to stay idle until Feb. 16, the state nuclear energy company Energoatom said. The repairs will include replacing some of the reactor's safety equipment and checking its other components to make sure the reactor can operate safely until April 1999, when it is to undergo additional repairs, a spokesman at Chernobyl said. Ukraine's nuclear authorities originally ordered the reactor shut for repairs by Dec. 1, but the Energy Ministry asked for a two-week delay, until another nuclear reactor was restarted, because it could not compensate for the energy loss otherwise. Two nuclear reactors were restarted this week, allowing energy officials to finally stop the Chernobyl reactor, where frequent malfunctions this year have again raised concerns over its safety. The reactor underwent major repairs between July 1997 and May 1998, but has been stopped many times since. Reactor No. 3 has been Chernobyl's only working reactor since 1996, and plans call for the plant to be shut down entirely by 2000. Another of Chernobyl's four Soviet-designed reactors was closed in 1996, the third has been inactive since a 1991 fire, and the fourth was destroyed in a 1986 explosion and fire, the world's worst nuclear accident. Ukraine has five nuclear power plants that account for more than 40 per cent of the country's electricity production.

China executes 7 for armed robbery

BEIJING (AP) — Authorities in southern Guangdong province have executed seven gang members who were convicted for dozens of armed robberies and possession of and trafficking in guns and ammunition, according to a report seen Wednesday in Beijing. The members of the group were known as the "two gun, one axe" gang were executed Tuesday after Guangdong's highest court rejected their appeals, the local newspaper Yangcheng Evening News reported. It said the group's members were found guilty of killing three people and committing about 50 armed robberies or burglaries as well as trafficking in weapons. A court in Beijing, meanwhile, has sentenced to death a man convicted of selling heroin, the official newspaper China Daily reported Wednesday. Ma Yong, an unemployed man from Gansu province — a drug trafficking corridor in northwestern China — was caught selling 299 grammes of heroin in a Beijing park last May, the report said. The Beijing No. 1 Intermediate Court, which sentenced Ma Monday, also sentenced an accomplice, Yan Yiling, to life imprisonment. It said. The court also ordered the confiscation of all of Ma and Yan's property. The report said the two could appeal to a higher court within 10 days after the verdict. The severe sentences were cited as evidence of the government's determination to curb the fast-growing trade in illegal drugs.



PRINCESS AISHA OPENS HALL: On the occasion of His Majesty King Hussein's 63rd birthday, Her Royal Highness Princess Aisha on Wednesday opens the Hashemite Hall at Princess Taghrid Girls School in Qweisneh. Princess Aisha toured the hall's various sections, which include pictures of Hashemite family members, old and recent photographs of King Hussein, and books and manuscripts about the Great Arab Revolt (Petra photo)

Jordan urges Iran to support peace process

AMMAN (Agencies) — Foreign Minister Abdul Ilah Khatib on Wednesday held talks with visiting Iranian Minister of Industry Gholam Rida Shafi'i on bilateral and regional issues.

In their talks, Khatib urged Iran to support the Arab-Israeli peace process.

Khatib stressed "the need for our brothers in Iran to support the Arab negotia-

tions [with Israel], which will serve the interests of both the Arab and Islamic nations," AFP quoted the Jordan News Agency, Petra, as reporting. The minister, who was briefing Shafi'i, currently on a three-day visit to Jordan, on the latest developments in the peace process, pointed out "the importance that they understand the difficulties of the process."

Khatib told Shafi'i that Jordan backs the resumption of negotiations on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks and reiterated Jordan's support for the Palestinians.

The minister also expressed hope that Jordanian-Iranian political and economic ties would be a model for other Arab and Islamic countries.

For his part, Shafi'i pre-

sented a briefing on Wednesday's meeting of the joint Jordanian-Iranian committee, which discussed oil, petrochemical, agricultural and banking issues.

Shafi'i also held meetings with Lower House of Parliament Speaker Abdul Hadi Majali and relayed greetings from the head of the Iranian Islamic Shura Council, Ali Akbar Nateq-Nouri.

No evidence of bakeries using suspect substance

AMMAN (J.T.) — The government Wednesday said it has not found evidence that any bakeries in the Kingdom are using banned substances believed to cause cancer.

The Ministry of Industry and Trade conducted random inspections on bakeries across the Kingdom after receiving reports from police departments about alleged use of potassium bromide in commercial baking, and discovered that no bakeries are using the banned substance," said Minister of Industry and Trade Mohammad Saleh Hourani at Wednesday's Parliament ses-

sion. "Importing potassium bromide is banned because it causes cancer," said Hourani, replying to criticism of the media's handling of the issue levelled by Deputy Ghazi Obeidat, who called on the government to investigate recent media reports and put an end to the issue.

Obeidat said there was no proof that the bakeries had used the banned substance, adding that no bakery owner would want to poison people.

Obeidat, an oncologist, also said the substance had not been proven to cause cancer.

"Nobody exactly knows the root cause of any type of cancer, and if we knew we would have controlled it," he said. The issue was raised earlier this week when a local newspaper reported on a government move eight months ago to shut down three bakeries for allegedly using the banned substance.

"The ministry asked the Customs Department on Sept. 30 not to allow the entry of potassium bromide and confiscate any quantities carried in personal luggage," said Hourani.

"The ministry will continue cooperating with the con-

cerned parties to conduct spot checks on bakeries and will continue to test their products," said the minister. He added that the ministry will not hesitate to apply the law and punish violators.

According to the law, bakery owners can receive sentences of up to three months in prison and fines up to JD5,000 for using illegal additives. The law also stipulates that bakeries using such substances will be closed indefinitely until the bakery owner complies with the law, said an official from Ministry of Industry and Trade.

During meeting with Arab economic council official Regent calls for efforts towards Arab economic integration

AMMAN (Petra) — His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, Wednesday received at the Royal Court the secretary general of the Council of Arab Economic Unity, Hassan Ibrahim, for talks on efforts to step up cooperation among Arab countries to achieve economic integration.

At the meeting, attended by Royal Court Chief Jawad Anani, the Regent called for further efforts towards achieving the

aspired economic integration among Arab countries, adding that such integration is a major factor in protecting Arab economic interests.

After the meeting, Ibrahim told the Jordan News Agency, Petra, that economic integration requires liberalising trade and ensuring the free movement of workers and persons.

To achieve that, the Arabs should create an Arab common market, plan for pan-

Arab development and create a large production base to increase inter-Arab trade and help reduce high unemployment rates by creating job opportunities through joint Arab projects.

Ibrahim noted that the Arab Economic Council has been trying to revive the Arab common market idea, liberalise trade among Arab states and create joint Arab projects.

When the council took a decision in 1964 to create the Arab common market,

five countries, Jordan, Egypt, Iraq, Syria and Libya, announced their intention to join and were followed later by Mauritania and Yemen, Ibrahim said.

Noting that some progress was made towards realising this market during the 1960s and 1970s, Ibrahim said the idea was later abandoned because of regional and international circumstances and strained relations among Arab states.

Government urged to release, protect women threatened by relatives

Rights group submits memo over 50 women in 'protective detention'

By Rana Hussein

AMMAN — A human rights group is calling on the government to guarantee the freedom and security of 50 women detained in prison for "administrative reasons."

In a memorandum delivered to Prime Minister Fayez Tarawneh recently, the Arab Organisation for Human Rights called for the release of the 50 women from correctional facilities "without any charges."

Many women are forced to spend indefinite terms in the country's correctional facilities under what the state terms "administrative detention," but what is actually a system of protection so that they will not be killed by relatives for having "dishonoured" the family.

"It is the government's responsibility to ensure these women's safety and life rather than place them in prison," said Najib Rashdan, president of the organisation.

Hiam Kalimat, another organisation member, said "these women are kept in prison without any charges, and they do not deserve to be

there. We are calling on the government to secure their safety and ensure better living conditions for them."

Kalimat told the Jordan Times that these women have no place to go because their families refuse to accept them or they are detained by the authorities out of fear that their families might kill them once they are released.

"From my experience as a social worker, I came across many cases whereby women, who were not involved in immoral acts, were killed by their families after being released from prisons," Kalimat said.

In November, a 42-year-old father slit his daughter's throat in Ghamadan Park on the outskirts of Amman for "honour reasons," minutes after signing a guarantee in front of the Amman governor that he would not harm his daughter. The daughter, 17, had been in administrative detention for eloping with her lover.

The government announced plans in May to set up the first centre in Jordan to shelter abused women

and those whose lives are threatened by their relatives because of "family honour."

Around 25 to 30 women are reportedly killed in Jordan annually by relatives for perceived "immoral acts," forcing human rights activists and many government officials to protest such inhuman practices against women.

According to Kalimat, the organisation has also called on the government to consider amending article 340 of the Penal Code, which she said discriminates against women.

One paragraph in the code states that "He who discovers his wife, or one of his female relatives, in an adulterous situation, and kills, wounds or injures one or both of them, benefits from a reduction in penalty."

On the other hand, if situations were reversed and a woman found her husband with another woman and killed him, she would not benefit from any reduction in penalty, and would be sentenced to between five to 15 years in prison.

"We are calling for equali-

ty in the law regarding imposing punishments against the perpetrators of such a crime," Kalimat said.

His Majesty King Hussein has asked the current and previous governments to prepare amendments to current laws to address and rectify legal contradictions in the judicial process concerning violence against women.

During the opening of the 13th Parliament last November, the King told parliamentarians that "we must pay serious attention to some of the dangerous phenomena that remain a source of women's sufferings and which, unfortunately, constitute an inhuman violation of their basic rights."

Also during a recent meeting with tribal leaders, HRH Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, made similar pleas and called on all people concerned to work towards ending crimes of honour.

"Let us remember that the honour of the whole Jordanian family is more noble than the loss of life of this generation due to the trivialities of 'honour causes'," Prince Hassan said.

NEWS IN BRIEF

New rules on wastewater drainage

AMMAN (Petra) — Minister of Water and Energy Hani Mulki on Wednesday announced a three-month grace period for local industrial and trade institutions to adjust their situations to meet regulations issued yesterday on draining wastewater into the sewage network. The regulations prohibit draining treated and untreated wastewater from industrial and trade facilities into the sewage network unless permission is obtained from the ministry.

Majali receives message from Berri

AMMAN (Petra) — Lower House Speaker Abdul Hadi Majali on Wednesday received congratulations from his Lebanese counterpart, Nabi Berri, on his election to the post. Berri wished Majali success in helping the Jordanian people achieve success and in developing the two countries' relations.

Jordanian elected to church committee

HARARE (Petra) — Jordanian Awdeh Boutros Qawas was elected Wednesday as a member to the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches during its ninth meeting, with 4,000 participants representing 400 million Christians around the world. Qawas, representing the Greek Orthodox church in the Kingdom, is the first Jordanian to join the 150-member committee.

What's going on

EXHIBITIONS

* "A meeting with Iraqi artist Ismail Fahim by art critic 'Kifah Habbib' at Dar Al Fann, Jabbal Weibdeh on Thursday at 5:30 p.m.

* "Single All the Way" at the American Center, Abdoun on Thursday at 5:00 p.m.

THE NIGHTS OF RAMADAN FESTIVAL

* French film "Rien de tout" (sponsored by the French Cultural Centre) at Cinema Philadelphie on Saturday Dec. 19 at 8:00 p.m.

EUROPEAN FILM FESTIVAL

* Swedish film "Passagenen" on Thursday at 5:00 p.m.

* British film "The Woodlanders" on Thursday at 8:00 p.m. (to be shown again on Friday Dec. 18 at 5:00 p.m.).

* All films, with subtitles in English, are screened at the Royal Cultural Centre.

CONCERT

* Musical performance by the concert band of the National Music Conservatory, with conductor Barbara Johnson, at Terra Sancta Cultural Centre on Saturday Dec. 19 at 8:00 p.m.

Survey finds support for family planning among religious leaders

By Hind-Lara Mango

AQABA — The head of Jordan's top population committee Wednesday said a study by his commission has revealed that over 80 per cent of religious leaders support family planning.

Najib Salameh, secretary general of the National Population Commission, said the findings, outlined in a study conducted by the organisation this year, will help the Kingdom support family planning programmes.

"The NPC this year conducted research on the attitudes of religious leaders towards family planning, and over 80 per cent said they believe that family planning does not contradict religious teachings," Salameh said.

"We are making use of this support to enhance the NPC's programmes in family planning," Salameh told the Jordan Times on the sidelines of a

five-day USAID-funded workshop on "Communication, Research Management and Utilisation."

"It is very important to strike a balance between population growth in Jordan, which is standing at 3.6 per cent a year, and the gross domestic product, which is rated at one per cent," he added.

Officials and sociologists have warned for years about the impact of Jordan's rapid population growth, saying that it was placing massive burdens on the country's already strained health, education and other services.

But the vital issue of family planning remains a sensitive subject in conservative Jordan, where many of the 4.2 million people continue to see large families as a sign of fertility and a blessing from God.

However, Jordan's fertility rate, among the highest in the region, is showing a steady decline, according to Salwa

Bitar, senior programme manager at the Population and Family Health Office at USAID in Amman.

"In 1990, Jordan had a very high fertility rate of 5.6 children," she said. "But recent statistics indicate a drop to 3.9. This is a very good improvement."

USAID is one of the key parties offering financial assistance to the NPC to help it carry out a sensitive family planning communications strategy.

The NPC's strategy has helped raise awareness on the impact of family planning on sustainable development in the country.

It focuses on raising awareness on family planning among married couples, expanding the availability of family planning and primary health care services, and increasing the availability of modern contraceptives in the private sector.

According to Salameh, Jordan has a high contraceptive prevalence rate, with 37 per cent of women between the ages of 15 and 49 using modern methods and 52 per cent using traditional methods.

Salameh said the NPC strategy had eight domains with communication at its core. "Each domain related to the activities of the most important institutions and ministries."

Johns Hopkins University offered financial assistance to support the strategy, which was rated by participants at the workshop as the most outstanding of its type in Asia and the Near East.

"The family planning programme has been based on proper research during all of its phases of evaluation and monitoring," said Alfred Yassa, chief of the Near East Division at the Center for Communication Programs at Johns Hopkins.

"This has enabled it to

achieve its objectives," he added.

Yassa highlighted the importance of proper research in policy formulation and in devising strategies.

"Research is an expensive tool, but by not carrying it out, you create even more expensive problems. Developing countries do not give priority to research. It is not well utilised, not well designed, and is not well funded there."

Over 20 participants from various ministries, NGOs and the media are attending the seminar, which ends on Thursday.

The NPC, the focal reference and coordination point in Jordan for all population programmes, activities and information, is located at the Queen Alia Fund for Social Development.

"We use the fund's 52 development centres to promote population matters and services," Salameh said.

'Complex' Dutch film relies on dramatic details, scenes

By Dima Hamdan

AMMAN — "Karakter" (Character), from the Netherlands, was the winner of the most recent Academy Award for Best Foreign Film. Watching the first seconds of the film immediately explained why it was a sure winner.

Jacob, a young man in Rotterdam in the late 1920s, dressed in a fancy suit, barges into an old building by the harbour and goes up to the attic where an old man, Reverdhaven, is doing his desk work. Jacob takes out a dagger and stabs it into the desk, informing Reverdhaven that he has been sworn in as a lawyer and that their business relationship is over. Reverdhaven congratulates him but in a mocking manner, as if trying to provoke a fight.

Jacob resists the provocation and leaves the building immediately. A few minutes later, he runs up to the attic again where Reverdhaven is still at his desk, contemplating the dagger. Jacob jumps at him and the entire scene fades to black.

Later on, Reverdhaven is found dead

and Jacob is brought in for interrogation. The rest of the film is a flashback that tells the story, beginning with Jacob's birth and going through all the events in his life that finally led him to the inevitable confrontation with Reverdhaven that we saw at the beginning.

REVIEW

Reverdhaven is a blood-sucking moneylender who manipulates the law in order to enrich himself at the expense of the poor. Jacob is his son from a one-night stand with his former housekeeper Joba, who proves to be the only person that Reverdhaven could never tame or manipulate, as she refused all his proposals for marriage. Jacob lives through his difficult childhood with a complicated mother who offers nothing more than basic shelter.

During the early years of his adolescence, he discovers the identity of his father, and one day, Jacob gets into trouble and attempts to seek his father's help. However, he is surprised when his father denies their relationship and

realises that he is an even more complicated and sick parent than his mother.

Jacob decides to forget about his father, but fate brings them into another confrontation when Jacob discovers that he borrowed a huge sum of money from his father's bank. Knowing this, Reverdhaven insists on treating his son in the same manner he treats all the poor and drags him into court in order to get back at him and his mother. Jacob finally pays his debt, but he deliberately throws himself into another confrontation with his father and asks him directly for another loan to fund his education.

Years go by during which Jacob endures struggles to make his way through life, while Reverdhaven throws in the occasional trouble just to prove his dominance. During that time, there is very little confrontation between them, and their exchange of words does not exceed a few abrupt sentences or threats.

Finally, Jacob pays off the debt and becomes a lawyer at a prestigious firm only to realise that he gained nothing, and that his eternal torment has been

enforced on him by both his parents, who treated him more as a rival than a son.

In turn, we see that, in a perverted way, there was a loving bond between all three characters: Reverdhaven's love for Joba and his frustration at his inability to marry her is the main factor that brought on the misery plaguing his entire family. Furthermore, he is convinced that what he had enforced on his son what only done out of love: in his own words, he attests that he intends to "strangle him nine-tenths, and the last tenth shall make him strong."

Apart from all the basic elements that make a film successful, and the title which, in its simplicity, was very impressive, this was one of the very few films where all the scenes and details were constructed to serve the core of the plot. Every small detail in the story was constructed perfectly; in each scene, the viewer encounters a symbol or a sign that helps to further unravel the mysteries of the characters. The outcome was a complex and highly engaging film in all its aspects.

Environment society delivers message to children through theatre

By Susan Resheq

AMMAN — The Jordan Environment Society is using theatre to deliver its message about environmental protection to children.

The society on Tuesday presented a play entitled "The Earth is Judging Man," performed by students from Um Qosair and Al Muqablain schools.

"We should use 'new' methods to deliver ideas to children, and using theatre is one such method which could enlighten children," said the director of the play, Maher Teshit.

The play focused on pollution in general, desertification, waste and the dangers of the world's rising population, all of which can cause serious environmental problems and eventually threaten human life, according to the society.

Specific topics targeted in the production were fertilisers in plant cultivation, burying waste underground, and excessive deforestation, which has depleted green areas and thus poses threats to wildlife.

"Children should be aware of such problems so that generations will think about their life and try to solve problems in a realistic way. I think that it is better than thinking of fictional matters," said the writer of the play, Summar Salameh.

The play was sponsored by the Jordan Environment Society and the Environment Committee at the Jordan Engineers Association.

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Questions

BARELY ONE day after U.S. President Bill Clinton left the Middle East following a historic visit during which he was hailed as a peacemaker, he beat the ploughshare into a sword and launched a military campaign in the region.

World opinion, it seems, is expected to bow to the opinion of the U.S. National Security Council and disregard the strong objections of other U.N. Security Council members like France, China and Russia. The U.S. president says that the U.S. has nothing against the Iraqi people, but, sadly, a number of innocent people will have to die. The question is, why was such military action necessary now, or more to the point, necessary at all?

Despite all of the well-phrased and logical assurances given by the U.S. administration and the military establishment, there were unfortunately not a few odd coincidences that keep rearing their ugly heads. The first is one that probably no one felt the need to say, but thankfully, Congress spared the world the effort: in the event of a military strike against Iraq, impeachment proceedings against the president would be suspended. As a number of American politicians could not help but point out, the timing was not exactly the stuff to dispel any lingering speculation.

Another odd thing that none of the apologists really explained was the remarkable window of opportunity that opened up right before Ramadan. UNSCOM chief Richard Butler filed a negative report at a time that will allow just enough time, three days, to effectively "degrade and diminish" Saddam Hussein's weapons capability in a manner that will not "impinge on the sensitivities of the Muslim and Arab worlds," as if Iraqis or Muslims or humans anywhere in the world could feel grateful for such a "sensitive" gesture. Three days to do what eight years of sanctions and inspections could not, on an extremely precise timetable, with the added benefit of not offending anyone.

The whole issue of the military presence in the Gulf region also merits scrutiny. How many cruise missiles were fired last night into Iraq? How many battle groups are on their way to the region? How much will this adventure cost?

The fact of the matter, despite the claims on both sides, is this: after almost eight years of sanctions and inspections, Saddam Hussein is still in power. The U.S. and Britain, so they say, believe Iraq still has the capability of assembling weapons of mass destruction. Over one million people — mostly children — against whom no one held any grudge, are dead. When does it end? U.S. officials last night could offer us no assurances, while commentators last night expressed surprise that Iraqi people were moving around Baghdad during the attack. It shouldn't come as a surprise — after all, they are the only ones who have had to endure the last eight years.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

Al Ra'i's Raja Issa said that Monday will not be forgotten by Palestinians; the PNA charter was amended. Gaza airport was inaugurated and both Arafat's and Clinton's speeches will go down in the history of the nation's struggle as hugely significant. It was notable that Clinton did not disclose the amount of money the PNA might receive, even though he made public his request to Congress to allocate \$1,300 million to Israel. Perhaps the most "beautiful" part of Clinton's speech, claimed Issa, was his affirmation of the legitimacy of Palestinians' rights on their own land. The question remains though, said Issa, where is that land? Let [Israel] give the land and then receive "legitimate practices" in turn, he argued.

Al Dustour's editorial said the meeting of HRH Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, with U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright embodied the important role Jordan plays in the peace process. The visit was an acknowledgement of the vital duties carried out by the Kingdom's leadership in line with diplomatic efforts to overcome obstacles facing the process, added the newspaper. The timing of the trip, ahead of the conclusion of President Clinton's historical visit to Palestine and Israel, testifies to its significance and affirms U.S. commitment to the Wye Accord's implementation. Despite Netanyahu's intransigence, which has hampered Clinton's efforts in Gaza, claimed the paper, the Regent's vision of final status issues have focused minds on the importance of the peace process. Prince Hassan talked about security, Jerusalem, water and refugees, while all the time stressing Jordan's interest in finding a solution for these topics, which involve all parties in the region, said the paper.

Higher education at a crossroads

View from Academia



Dr. Ahmad Y. Majdoubieh

FOR ALL higher education institutions in the Kingdom, the remaining year or so of the present millennium and the early years of the forthcoming are crucial indeed, or so it seems. Our universities in particular are passing through a very delicate, sensitive transitional period, one in which much is being, and will continue to be, thoroughly reconsidered, or so we like to believe. There is a widespread feeling (and at this level there is no doubt) among all students, faculty members and administrators — that though what we have achieved so far is something to be proud of, what is to come ought to be done a lot more carefully, efficiently and effectively.

Why are the said years crucial and why is the said period delicate or sensitive? Well, for one thing, a lot that is going to happen in the future (near or distant) depends to a remarkable degree on what we aim or plan to do about it now. For another, what we are up to (or up against, depending on how you look at it) is a lot. It may be that in other parts of the globe what is being considered or reconsidered is a matter here and there — a matter there, a programme here and a programme there — no matter how substantial the change that is taking place in the more developed

part of the world is, much of it most probably lies under what you may call the icing on the cake. In our part of the world, the changes are (in most cases) fundamental and total — we have not finished the cake yet, to start putting the icing on it.

For our public universities, there is a third reason. Up until recently, all of our public universities (or nearly all) have been working from the premise that the state is, or ought, to take care of their many needs, especially the financial. Such a premise no longer holds ground. At one point in time, there was one, two or three universities to cater to, State support was substantial. Today, the picture has changed remarkably. The number of public universities has doubled, tripled, and quadrupled over the past two decades. The state, due to internal, regional and global developments, is no longer able to support the universities in any substantial way. Since the late eighties, in particular, it has become apparent that the universities must fend for themselves in order to survive, thrive and excel.

What I am saying is that our universities (and educational institutions generally) have, for some time, enjoyed a comfort similar to that enjoyed by human beings in the state of

infancy or childhood, where one's every need is taken care of, and where one feels secure in a state of total dependence on others. At present, the honeymoon is over. Our universities are entering the state of adulthood where they must rely on themselves.

This is not easy — though it certainly is inevitable and ultimately correct. What adds to the discomfort is that the shift — from childhood to adulthood or from almost total dependence to almost total independence — has been somewhat too abrupt to digest and cope with. A spender is all of a sudden expected to be a provider, a consumer is expected to be a producer, an executor is expected to be a thinker, a spontaneous organiser is expected to be a planner, and so forth. There is a big challenge here.

The cultural context must not be ignored. Many of the philosophies from which our aims stem, our concepts spring, and our approaches are derived come from outside our cultural borders. We are talking about partnership with industries, market-oriented programs, research tied to social needs, fundraising, quality education, TQM, ISO 9000, etc. Such concepts, and many others like them, are still foreign to many

among us. It is going to take time for them to sink into people's psyches and time for people to start acting upon them seriously.

These and other challenges, we should emphasise, should not put us down or frustrate us in any way. When we cite them, it is not to say that changes in our part of the world are impossible to effect. Rather, it is to stress the crucial, delicate and sensitive nature of the moment. It is to stress the importance of the soundness, aptness, and correctness of the decisions we make now about what to do in the future, the plans we draw, the strategies we crystallise and the approaches we adopt.

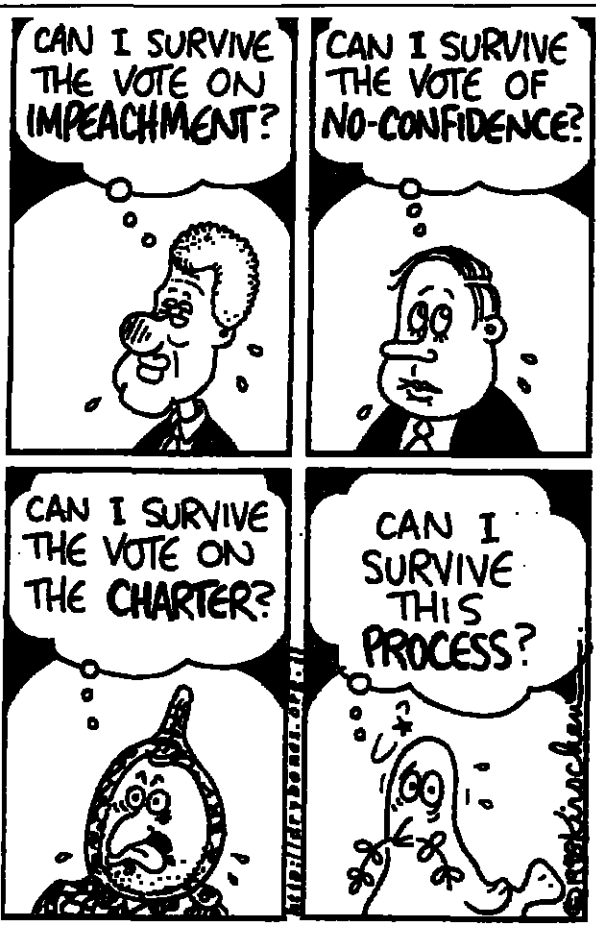
But just as there are challenges and anxieties, there is good news. The first and foremost piece of good news emerges from the fact that we have not been caught unprepared. There has, since the 1987 Education Reform Conference, been a growing interest in the lot of education and educational institutions in our part of the world. Plans have been drawn up to tackle head on the problems from which our system of education suffers, and the various impediments and obstacles standing in the way.

More recently, and for the

and the solutions are, and precisely how to go about overcoming such problems and materialising the solutions. More importantly, it lies in the administration's willingness and enthusiasm to bring about change. In our part of the world, signals for change have to come from above, not from below. People at the bottom of the ladder respond positively to signals from above, especially if those at the top push for the realisation of the signals and keep the momentum going.

But the beauty of the five-year development plan which the University of Jordan is crystallising, in the drawing of which all faculty members and employees are presently involved, lies in the fact that it is bringing the ideas of those at the bottom of the ladder to those at the top. Everyone is taking part in the determination of what needs to be done, and how it should be done. This collective brainstorming is a crucial step for the university, one which will undoubtedly yield positive results. This is the way to go.

The path is long and may be strewn with thorns; but tread it we must, stick it out we will have to.



LETTERS

Up in smoke

To the editor:

NOW THAT the president and production manager of Jordan Tobacco Company have been arrested, maybe the company can start making a good cigarette. The current levels of nicotine and tar in their brand of Marlboro Lights exceed the levels found in the same cigarettes, in other countries. Tar and nicotine in Saudi Marlboro Lights are approximately 0.6mg and 0.5 mg. In our cigarettes they are 10mg and 0.7mg. What is the use of making the same brand of cigarette if it's not the same quality? In fact, the levels found in the Jordanian Marlboro Lights exceed the tar and nicotine levels in the Saudi, regular, Marlboro cigarette.

Another strange thing is that the company doesn't print the levels of nicotine and tar on any other brand of their cigarettes. Is it not required to do so by law? An advertisement in Newsweek about Marlboro Lights contains warnings about carbon monoxide. Saudi Marlboro Lights also state the level of carbon monoxide in their cigarettes. Why do Jordanian Marlboro Lights ignore the fact that carbon monoxide is dangerous and omit printing its level on the box? Current warnings about the dangers of cigarettes are not enough.

Finally, why are the levels of tar and nicotine stated on a pack of Carrier cigarettes manufactured in Switzerland but not on a pack manufactured in Jordan and available at Safeway?

Yasser Atiyeh
 Amman

The right to dream

Jerusalem Life



Daoud Kufiab

TWENTY FIVE years ago Israel's Prime Minister Golda Meir questioned the very existence of Palestinians as a separate national entity. This week as Palestinians once again confirmed their amendment of the PLO covenant, the President of the United States reaffirmed in word and in deed the existence of a distinctive national Palestinian identity.

But as the leader of the western world was encouraging the forward looking attitudes of the Palestinians, the Israelis were looking back as they were digging in their heels. Having amended all the clauses that contradict the Peace Accords back in 1996, the leaders and representatives of the Palestinian people raised their hands and stood up to tell the world that they are turning a page in their history.

Palestinians looked to their new-found American friend for help in getting their political prisoners released, their land liberated and their future secured. On the other side, the Israelis were crying over their dead, talking about Palestinians with blood on their hands and denying their supposed peace partners the right to dream.

The Israeli prime minister spoke with arrogance and defiance completely ignoring the Palestinians' outstretched hands for peace. We will not move from our position until the Palestinians stop talking about Jerusalem as their capital, the Israeli prime minister insisted. We will not carry out any further redeployments until the Palestinians declare their acceptance to our criteria for the release of their prisoners, he insisted. The Netanyahu argument seems to be that somehow, if the Palestinian leader accepts the release of common criminals instead of freedom fighters, this will end the popular protests against the Israelis.

All the above conditions are presented in the media as genuine commitments that the Palestinian National Authority made at the Wye Agreement. None of them appear in the Wye Memorandum. What does appear in that agreement was the need for Israel to make another redeployment from Palestinian territories on Friday. The safe passage road between Gaza and the West Bank should have been opened by now and the economic woes facing the Palestinians were to have been resolved by the Israelis.

What is troubling is not only the failure to implement these specific obligations under the Wye Agreement but the general mood that has been projected. Palestinians and to a large degree the Americans, are now convinced that the present Israeli government is not interested in a genuine peace. Every possible excuse is found to defer carrying out what is

required to move the peace process forward. There are violations not only of the letter of the Agreement but, more importantly of the spirit of peace. President Clinton talked about this when he spoke about the need for reconciliation and generous genuine peace. He specifically spoke against a "grudging peace." Although he spoke these words to a Palestinian audience, there is no doubt he was talking to the Israelis and specifically to the Netanyahu government.

The most obvious difference in the attitudes of Palestinians and Israelis were seen in the itinerary of the first couple on Tuesday. Both Palestinians and Israelis were asked to recommend where they would like the U.S. President, his wife Hillary and daughter Chelsea to go on their last day in the region.

The Palestinians recommended Bethlehem and provided a Christmas choir, decorating the Nativity tree and a visit to the birthplace of Jesus. The leaders and people of Bethlehem were out in throngs fighting for a chance to take a glimpse of the U.S. president, U.S. and Palestinian flags decked the buildings and a special poster was created for the occasion. As children sang Christmas carols, hundreds of posters spoke of the Palestinian dream of "freedom and independence." On the other side, the Israeli choice was the complete opposite. They chose the desert castle of Massada. The symbolism of the location puzzled the American visitors. After all this was the sight of mass suicide by zealous Jewish radicals. Two contradictory symbols. One looking to the future and singing for peace on earth and goodwill to men; the other presenting a fortress mentality.

The balance of forces in the Middle East is not in favour of the Palestinians. They are the weak party in a negotiations process where Israelis are trying to dictate every step. The political leadership of the Palestinian people will try to obtain the best possible deal considering their adverse negotiating position. But the fact that Arafat and his aides are forced to accept an inferior agreement, doesn't mean that the Palestinian people, including their leadership, should not be allowed to dream.

Developing Two-track liberalisation

BEIRUT — Despite obvious problems, Lebanon can still be a model for the other states in the region. Particularly in this age of liberalisation, the Lebanese, having a free economy and a more open society than many in the neighbourhood, can still show others the way to go.

This is particularly true of the issue of press freedom. Not just a luxury, unfettered news media are increasingly being seen as essential to development, and the best way for leaders and the public alike — local and foreign — to learn about the true conditions of a country and its economy.

The matter goes far beyond what is good for the media themselves and their customers. As is being recognised by key economic players around the world — including the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank — sustainable development and steady growth are better achieved in the context of a democratic system with a free press. If policy makers can keep their fingers on the pulse of an economy and find out what is going on in the marketplace, the whole country could be better off. The Bretton Woods institutions learned this lesson, drawing the proper conclusions from the Asian collapse last year about what should have been the proper role of a free press.

The bad news is that — Lebanon excepted — this attitude is not that of many in the region. In countries quite different from each other and otherwise on the right track of reform in some ways, state officials continue to bully the press. Happily, Lebanon is going in the opposite direction, and may even review its imperfect media law.

Obviously, more press freedom is not suddenly going to double the growth rate; but, it will help allow everybody concerned to take a closer look at how things are going in the economy and so give policy makers a better sense of direction. Press freedom is desirable in itself, but it should also be seen as a valuable tool for economic development. Democracy and development both

require adequate levels of information and popular participation. This was one of the themes of the recent Roundtable in Amman on "Culture and Communication: A Global Information Society," co-sponsored by the Jemstone program, the Jordan Institute of Diplomacy, and the McBride Round Table. The meeting focused on, among other topics, the relation between democracy and development. Some participants rightly mentioned that a sort of development can take place without democracy; economic growth, more R&D, and better exports have sometimes been achieved under authoritarian regimes. Indonesia recently presented such a picture. However, for the Indonesians in particular, it was reckoned that with enough democratic press liberty, the excesses of its 1997 collapse would have been avoided. By allowing people to express themselves freely about economic issues, the writing on the wall would have been legible earlier, allowing the Bank, the IMF and others to help stave off a crash. A free press by itself will not prevent stock markets or currencies from tumbling, but it can help by anticipating problems.

Indonesia-style development models were supported by both superpowers during the Cold War, giving succour to repressive regimes. However, though cold war may be a thing of the past for many countries, our part of the world still feels distinctly chilly. In the case of most Middle Eastern and North African countries, a kind of transition towards democracy and free markets is taking shape while the region is still coping with conflicts. However, it may be unrealistic to expect democracy and healthy development while the region is still highly penetrated by external forces and influences. South-east Asia and Eastern Europe were not able to begin the transition to free political and economic and market systems until they ceased to be centres of competition by the big powers. Could the same be true for our region? To twist a famous phrase around, diplomacy still seems to be a continuation of economics

by other means, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa. The state of the region over the past few years can be better understood if we take into account post-Cold War U.S.-European rivalry. Among notable U.S. economic successes have been inroads into Algeria and Egypt, not to mention the predominant American position in most of the Gulf Co-operation Council countries; on the other hand, the EU is still in trade and investment in Tunisia, Syria, Iran and Lebanon. The battle continues for our hearts, minds, and markets.

True, such competition is peaceful, and anyway the Middle East and North Africa region as a whole is small beer as far as international business is concerned. Nevertheless, with global contraction Western countries will become even more aggressive as they compete among themselves in this part of the world. Superimpose this on local problems, and the result is instability.

Does this mean we should suspend liberalising until all of our regional conflicts are sorted out? Even if such an option were open — and in my opinion it isn't — we shouldn't take it. Fine tuning development and adjusting liberalisation to fit regional characteristics is OK, but to try to halt this process because this part of the world is still a hotbed of local and international conflict would only make us more vulnerable to outside shocks. The details of the Lebanese model of a market economy and a liberal political system, both buttressed by a free press, may not be applicable in Sanaa or the Sudan, but the broader ideas are. As long as Israeli and other forces destabilize the region from the inside, while the U.S. and EU businesses are competing more steadily throughout the Middle East and North Africa, it's not going to be plain sailing in this part of the world. However, that doesn't mean we should batten down the hatches and head back to port, suspending political and economic reform, and casting the idea of a free press overboard.

Regent: Jordan is central to the region and is fully committed to the removal of weapons of mass destruction

Following are excerpts from Tuesday's joint press conference with His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, and U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, at the Royal Palace.

Regent: Ladies and gentlemen, I'd like to congratulate Secretary Albright on behalf of His Majesty King Hussein, who stood so boldly by President Clinton, President Arafat and Prime Minister Netanyahu. Only a few short weeks ago at the conclusion of the Wye River talks, to say on his behalf how deeply appreciative we are of the personal commitment and dedication of Secretary Albright and the peace team, which I understand is now continuing with its commitment to work with specialised committees to see through what was agreed upon in the ongoing conversations yesterday and today. Welcome to Jordan and on behalf of all here may I thank you for your contribution in coming here to show visibly that once again Jordan stands out as a visible contributor and a visible partner in our shared common search for peace with a human peace. Thank you.

Albright: Thank you very much and I am very pleased to be in Jordan and to have had the opportunity to meet with HRH Crown Prince Hassan and to discuss the many interests our two countries have in common.

I discussed President Clinton's historic visit to Gaza and his productive meetings (with both sides). I also took the opportunity to reiterate our admiration for the courageous role played by His Majesty King Hussein and the government of Jordan in support of the Middle East peace process. In fact, without King Hussein's presence at Wye, I think we would not have gotten as far. He provided us with a very moving and magic time. By striving to heal the divisions that have torn the region for so long, Jordan has made many friends in the United States and earned the admiration of the world. The admiration certainly extends to Crown Prince Hassan because of the superb leadership he has shown both domestically and internationally during the King's illness. We will pray for the King, for his health and for his return to his people here in Jordan. But we are also very grateful for the Crown Prince's experience, strength and vision. I must say that in the months that I have known him, we have engaged in

some very interesting and productive discussions and we were able to continue that this morning. Although much changes in the Middle East, the tradition of effective leadership in Jordan carries on.

On behalf of President Clinton, I have assured the Crown Prince of America's ongoing commitment to help bring greater economic opportunities to the people of Jordan and to help Jordan meet its security needs. In that regard, I discussed with the Crown Prince our intent to work with Congress to obtain \$200 million in additional security assistance to Jordan in addition to our annual economic and military assistance programme for which we will seek \$225 million in the coming year.

We are encouraged that Jordan's economic team is working closely with the World Bank and the IMF to provide a strong foundation for future growth, and we remain the largest cash donors to the United Nations agency that provides for Palestinian refugees throughout the region. More broadly, we retain our deep interests in helping the peoples of the Middle East to break down the remaining barriers to mutual trust and cooperation. The government of Jordan has been a leader in this effort. On the fundamental issues of trade, tourism, investment and the stewardship of water and natural resources, the path of cooperation is the sure way to a brighter future. In closing, let me just say again that the United States is very pleased to count among its closest friends and allies the Kingdom of Jordan. And I am very pleased to have the opportunity to meet once again with a distinguished leader as His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan. And finally let me wish everyone a blessed Ramadan and a happy holiday season.

In reply to a question on a statement issued by the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Tuesday that his government would not carry out a second troop redeployment scheduled for Friday under the Wye River accord, the Regent said:

Well, if I may just say that the Secretary emphasised a very important word: trust. And in terms of the communications that we have seen over the past few days, indeed with Prime Minister Tarawneh visiting Gaza. I would like to emphasise the importance of the achievement in demystifying some of the issues: the question

of prisoners for example. The question of security, as I said once again... is not only the vitality of projects, the airport and the industrial estate. People want to know, mothers want to know what is the future of their children. And I think that with all due respect to the achievement today it has been a human achievement. What is important to see in terms of the committees and their work is how they will contribute to institutionalising this conversation and this new reality.

Albright: The president and the delegation came to the region as part of the fulfillment of Wye. The president had said that he would come [to] Gaza to be present at what really did turn out to be a historic occasion and [an] opportunity to turn a page and move away from the ideological underpinnings of struggle, to a time where the peace process is the guiding light, and I think it is very important to understand the importance of what did happen yesterday at the PNC meeting, because there have been a number of statements and letters in the past years that abrogated the parts of the Palestinian covenant that were offensive to Israel, but this was a public meeting that allowed the people of Israel to hear the message, and that is a point that President Clinton made [about] a people to people message and the desire to move into a different atmosphere. We came also to Israel and Gaza in order to be able to restore communication and get the peace process back on track and moving forward and the first phase of the implementation had actually worked well because the two parties were talking to each other. In recent weeks, there has been a breakdown of communication. I think primarily over the prisoner issue, and this morning, in the discussion that the president held in the trilateral meeting, it was decided that there were a number of ways the peace process could get back on track and one of them was that there is a chance for dealing with the prisoner questions. The Israelis did what they said they would do as far as prisoner releases were concerned, but clearly this is an issue of great sensitivity for the Palestinians, and so there was a plan made to deal with those problems on a case by case basis through this channel, and there is a hope that will indeed work.

We've said all along that there are mutual obligations on both sides — this is the key to Wye. Deployments

cannot be off the table. There are parts of the agreement that the Israeli government signed, and they have to go forward, as the Palestinians have to fulfil their obligations. It would be unfortunate if there were delays. [It is important] to have negotiations take place in good faith and move it forward. We have the ability to work very hard and push the process forward. The U.S. will do what we can, but leaders have to make the decisions.

Regent: If I may just follow on the question of final status in the American football idiom, we are not talking here of quarterfinal, semi and possibly final and final status. When we speak about overarching issues, quite frankly, with all due respect to President Clinton, to the American administration, to the government of Israel and indeed to our Palestinian brethren, when you talk about issues such as refugees, water, security, Jerusalem, you are by definition talking about overarching issues. The Jordanian peace treaty calls upon us to involve and invoke Jordanian interests when it comes to many of these issues. So I would like to point out that the process of conversations is important but in terms of the map of the region for comprehensive peace to be truly comprehensive, then you have to encourage the involvement of all parties concerned, including clearly, the role of Syria and Lebanon, at a given moment.

In response to a question on what measures have been taken to ensure Jordan's interests will be taken into account in final status talks, the Regent said:

I think that we obviously play a role at the level of His Majesty's statesmanship in terms of contributing to a vision of peace. And once again, we do not see final status as accumulation of events. We see next year as a new chapter in terms of discussing, not the interim, but in discussing the future of this region into the next millennium.

Albright: Could [I] just add that there is no question, as His Royal Highness said, that Jordan is very much a part of this, and we will be coordinating with our Jordanian friends as we move forward on final status, because a lot of these issues are larger than just between the two parties.

In reply to a question on whether

Clinton's three-day visit marked a change of attitude in relations between the U.S. and the Arab World, and what it meant vis-a-vis Iraq, Albright answered:

Well, first of all let me say that I do think it was an historic visit and an historic speech. I visited Gaza myself a few months ago, Prime Minister Netanyahu was also there, and I think there is an increasing sense that it is important for there to be a sense of understanding [from] both parties, what role will they play, what are their aspirations, and so the visit, I think, was a very appropriate one in terms of making more concrete, even in the airport itself, [that] which is concrete in terms of what was accomplished at Wye, and I think... the president's visit there was very symbolic of that. The president has for some time been trying very hard to express to the Arab World and to Muslims that the United States has the highest respect for the Islamic religion. There has been a tendency among some to not understand fully what the religion is about, and as the president said in his U.N. General Assembly speech, [it is] a simplistic approach that some times equates Islam with terrorism... he stated many times now that the Koran talks about reconciliation and friendship and peace, and that is a part the American people need to know more about in terms of Islamic religion. He reiterated that notion again in his speech in Gaza. I would hope very much, that having the president of the U.S. make those statements so clearly, that it would be recognised by Muslims and the Arab countries that we want to have a relationship of respect and [the understanding] that all of our religions are looking for peace, and the president's trip here symbolised that. We have talked about Iraq a lot. I do not think that they are representative of the Arab World. I think that their desire to eventually keep threatening neighbours and the region and our interest has nothing to do with the majority of the people that live in this region, and we are united, His Royal Highness can speak for himself, in terms of trying to deal with the threat of weapons of mass destruction posed by Saddam Hussein's activities and intentions.

Regent: Well, if I may, on the question of weapons of mass destruction and with reference not only to Iraq but to the broader region from Marakech to Bangladesh, if you will, we

are speaking of weapons of mass destruction and delivery systems in a number of countries, the most recent dismay to all of us was the nuclear explosions in both India and Pakistan. So I want to say that this country is central to the region, we live in a killing zone. I watch with interest our Israeli interlocutors talking about the distribution of new gas masks. We do not even have old gas masks! So clearly any use of nuclear, biological or chemical weapons is going to be a direct menace to the people of Jordan. We are fully committed to the removal of these weapons. We have made our point clear time and again to the Iraqi government that the full respect and compliance with international resolutions is essential. And that the point of regional thinking is at the top of our agenda in our conversation with the secretary, is basically determined by the fact that we are a lynch pin. We do live in a rough neighbourhood.

Turning to Arabs and Muslims, let me just cite two points about terror. Jews and Muslims were targeted in Sarajevo. Jordan was represented by 15,000 peace keepers in the Balkans as were moderate Muslim countries from Morocco to Bangladesh. No one in the press ever referred to them, no one referred to the fact that they worked with Jews against anti-Semitism in the understanding that they would work with us against Islamophobia or fear or hate of Islam. I was privileged only a few short months ago to receive an honorary degree at the University of Ulster, a Jewish chancellor, a non-denominational university and a Muslim recipient. And when they started talking about terror, I said please bear in mind that terror when used in the context of Islam is adjectival, and I would like to ask you is there such a thing as a Christian terror. So I hope that we can talk about the majority of Muslims, the majority of Christians. Incidentally, there is less than one per cent Christian Palestinian presence in historical Palestine today, there are more Christian Arabs in Sydney Australia than there are in Jerusalem, so I think that referring in civilised terms to a people and recognising their antecedents and their commitment to peace on the basis of a shared value system, Christian, Muslim and Jewish, is what we need to focus on, and in that I make a new plea to the press to focus not only on the sensational, but to focus on the human.

Society on the move

Eastern friends and eastern scenes

AFTER A LONG wait the Romanian embassy in Amman has a new ambassador. He is Vasile Sofniet, 49, and a one-time journalist. Sofniet obtained his BA in Persian language and literature at Tehran University in the early 70s. After graduation until 1990, he was editor of Radio Bucharest, programmes for abroad, Iran desk. He then decided on a career change that had long been his desire and became a diplomat at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Sofniet was quickly appointed first secretary at the Romanian embassy in Tehran that same year. During his four years in the Islamic republic, he was named chargé d'affaires for one year. From 1994 to 1998 he served as director at the Directorate of Press Relations at his foreign ministry until his appointment to Amman. Sofniet has published his translations of Persian prose and poetry in literary magazines. He and his wife Ghoulmar, who also speaks Turkish, have a 19-year-old daughter. Sofniet succeeds Ioan Agaficiu who returned to Romania earlier this year.

Diplomacy and business was a common mix last week on the entertaining scene of friendly Arab countries.

* On Friday visiting Egyptian Prime Minister Kamel Ganzouri was accompanied to a luncheon by Minister of Information Nasser Judeh at the residence of Egyptian Ambassador Hani Riad. The guest list included Prime Minister Fayez Tarawneh, Interior Minister Nayef Qadi, and several other politicians, businessmen, and journalists. The event was a social culmination of the meetings of the Higher Jordanian-Egyptian Committee which ended in the signing of 13 agreements between the two countries.

* To celebrate Bahrain's national day Ambassador Mohammad Bin Seif Jaber Al Musallam hosted a reception at the InterContinental Hotel on Tuesday. Also hosting a party for the same occasion, but inviting Ambassador Al Musallam as guest of honour, was Jordan Duty Free Shops Company Director Hanihan Majidi. While the recently opened duty free shop, located on the north side of Jabal Amman between the fourth and fifth circles, is stocked with all sorts of luxuries and spirits, the fare at the reception was a spread of sobering sweets, fruit juices and Awa Sada.

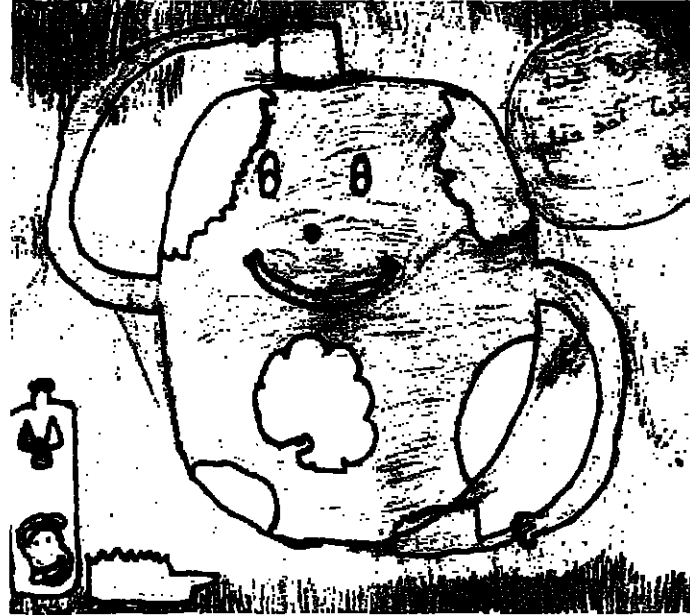
* The President of Jordan Kuwait Bank Abdul Karim Kabaria and bank board members hosted their annual celebration this year at Dimes

Club. Looking more and more like banking agrees with him and even sporting banker's pinstripes, former Prime Minister Kulkarni welcomed his guests who included ministers past and present, Lower House deputies, managers of other banks, businesspersons and newspaper editors.

JAPANESE FRIENDS: Sharif Jamil Bin Nasser, president of the Jordan-Japan Friendship Association hosted a dinner on Tuesday to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the association. Addressing the guests, who included Japanese Ambassador to Jordan Keiichi Matsumoto and association members, Sharif Jamil said he was deeply grateful to HRH Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, for his support for and encouragement of the association. He also paid tribute to His Majesty King Hussein and Emperor Hirohito of Japan, saying that "the foundation upon which the association strives to build, in however a humble manner, is the result of the friendship and mutual respect" between these two leaders. Sharif Jamil counted several events and projects as examples of the "outstanding development of common bonds, objectives and understanding between the two countries." Among them were the exchange of visits between the Crown Princes of both countries, Jordan Week in Japan, Japan Week in Jordan, and the considerable assistance Japan has provided Jordan over the last two decades. In reply, Ambassador Matsumoto noted that among the association's members were several persons who have held senior government posts or are active in the world of business. On the peace process he said that when Jordan is mentioned, the people of Japan automatically recall the Kingdom's role, and especially the active role of His Majesty King Hussein in bringing the recent Palestinian-Israeli agreement at the Wye Plantation to success. The ceremony ended with Sharif Jamil presenting the association shield to veteran businessman Ali Dujani and Ambassador Matsumoto.

MORE FROM JAPAN: The Japan Foundation presented 62 books on Japan Tuesday to the Institute of Diplomacy. During a ceremony held at the ID on the occasion, Ambassador Matsumoto explained that the Japan Foundation was a national cultural institution which aims to expand other countries' knowledge of Japan. Receiving the books was ID President Kamel Abu Jaber, ex minister of foreign affairs

The first prize winning artwork of Marina Jouri of the Amman National School, selected by the InterContinental Hotel school competition with the theme 'The World's Environment'. Eight-year-old Marina's drawing is being used as the InterContinental's holiday greeting card this season. Nice work Marina!!!!



EASTERN SCENE: The soon to be soft opening of the Grand Hyatt Amman will unveil the commissioned work of London-based Iraqi artist Dia Azzawi in grand style. The work is a five-metre long wall relief which the artist calls 'Mushad Sharqi' (Eastern scene). It has been installed in the Grand Lobby of the hotel. Azzawi's 'Mushad Sharqi' is a two-dimensional composition, cut and reassembled into a three-dimensional wall relief of ten overlapping parts, creating an architectural construction that takes the shape of its slightly convex background. The abstract composition reveals geometric patterns inspired by Arabic folklore, arabesque design and old stained glass. Born and educated in Iraq, Azzawi is a 1962 graduate of archaeology from Baghdad University, and also has a degree in fine art, obtained in 1964. He has lived in London since 1976. His work is well-known in Europe and throughout the Arab World, and his numerous public collectors are the Victoria and Albert Museum, London; the British Museum, London; the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris; and the Gulbenkian Collection, Barcelona. The Grand Hyatt Amman, the Middle East's first Grand Hyatt, opens to the public on Dec. 26. It promises an array of services to guests and the public from food, beverages and entertainment, to a health spa, business centre and deli. Now if only something could be done about that unsightly building across the road.

BAZAAR JAM: Al Hussein Society for the Rehabilitation/Rehabilitation of the Physically Challenged Annual Bazaar was another jam-packed success. The one-day pre-holiday bazaar features tables of national products from the countries of most of the diplomatic corps stationed in Amman as well as local NGOs. This year the table to clean up first was that of South Africa, which featured hand-made mahogany bowls. Perhaps the largest display table was that manned by the Israelis — and it was quite stocked with holiday shoppers checking out everything from cotton undies to Israeli manufactured sweets. Manning the tables were spotted Stefania Khulfeh for Scandinavia, Dodi Tabba for Pakistan, Flora Abu Kiseh for Greece, Ghoulmar Sofniet for Romania and Anumie Voght for Belgium.

WATER DUNK: Teaming up for an unusual match are basketball arch rivals Al Orthodox and Al Ahli on Tuesday (Dec. 22) at the Orthodox Club. The open invitation to the match is sponsored by the Jordan Environment Society, the Ministry of Water and the U.S. Agency for International Development. The event is held in support of the importance of public awareness of Jordan's water situation.

— Jennifer Hamarnah

Balance your act

chip talk



By Jean-Claude Elias

WITH THE current craze, which consists of upgrading an existing PC to bring it up to the latest standard, the danger of creating inefficient systems is real. At the beginning of the nineties users of personal computers started to realise that their machines were but an assembly of discrete components, each having a life of its own. The hard disk drive, the monitor, the memory chips, the CD-ROM drive, and the other elements of the PC can be chosen, replaced, removed and added separately, somewhat like the components of a stereo system, albeit not with the same simplicity.

The speed of change that is sweeping the world of small computers has accelerated the phenomenon, and the typical user bravely undertakes to upgrade his PC once or even twice a year. Apart from the risk of introducing or replacing parts that simply won't work at all with the others, the less obvious pitfall is creating a system that would be out of balance.

The principle is not different from any other upgrade we would do to equipment like cars or stereos for instance, though things may be a bit hidden when it comes to computers. Even without being a specialist in acoustics, one wouldn't connect say a 300 watts amplifier to a pair of speakers designed to withstand 50 watts. Similarly it doesn't take a degree in automotive engineering to know that a 1,000cc engine can't deliver the same air conditioning power as a 3,000 or 4,000cc car.

The new types of computer hard disc drives not only give us more storage capacity, they also offer faster transfer rates of data. The two characteristics go together. In other words, a new 8GB (eight billion characters) hard disc cannot store eight times more information than a 1GB disc, it also moves data (in and out) much faster than the older model. But of course, to deliver at peak performance, it will need to be working under the control of a faster computer too, overall.

Therefore, replacing an old 1GB disc with an 8GB model, on a computer fitted with a 486 processor is not a recommended operation (it's not "forbidden" either), unless one also replaces the 486 chip with a newer one.

The same applies to the other elements like the memory, the CD-ROM, and so forth. The basic, essential principle behind any good upgrade is balance. There's no point bragging about the new Pentium II 450 processor you just acquired if the rest of your machine is not at the same level in terms of memory, disc drives, etc. Usually, the problem doesn't exist when one buys a completely new computer, for the vendor, assumed to be an honest professional, would have done the homework for the client by configuring a balanced system. The difficulty mainly occurs when upgrading an existing PC. The simplest, safest method is to look at the specifications of the latest models in a computer magazine and find your "inspiration" there. It's almost foolproof.

Egypt targets 7% growth in 1999/2000

CAIRO (R) — Egypt's Prime Minister Kamal Ganzouri said Wednesday he expected the economy to grow a record seven per cent in fiscal 1999/2000, up from 6.2 per cent forecast this year and 5.7 per cent last year.

Ganzouri told parliament in an annual speech setting out his government's plans that Egypt had sound economic fundamentals and was pressing ahead with big desert development projects.

He said the government was determined to develop 19 new areas in the desert to relieve population density

in the Nile Valley, where almost all Egypt's 62 million people live.

"Our flight out of the narrow valley is not optional nor is it a desire to get into huge projects. We want to redraw the map to boost the inhabited area five-fold in 20 years," he said.

Egypt has already launched several large-scale industrial, agricultural and housing projects, including a major irrigation and farming scheme in the southern desert area of Toshka.

Ganzouri said Egypt's average per capita income had doubled to about

\$1,464 since it launched economic reforms in 1991. He said unemployment in a workforce of 18.3 million had fallen to 7.9 per cent this year and would drop to 7.4 per cent next year.

Ganzouri said the privatization programme begun in 1991 had covered 314 companies, of which 119 have been sold partially or totally for receipts of nine billion pounds (\$2.65 billion). He said no workers had been fired in the process. "This never happened in the world's privatisation programmes."

Ganzouri said the government had held the budget

deficit at one per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) for the past three years after slashing it from 24 per cent in 1991/92. "We need to work hard to maintain it," he added.

Inflation plummeted from 27 per cent in 1991/92 to four per cent this year, Ganzouri said. Foreign reserves of more than \$20 billion were also worth twice local currency in circulation.

Ganzouri said the exchange rate was stable, although bankers have complained in recent months of dollar shortages that have stifled the inter-bank pound/dollar market.

"Foreign currency is used to power the national economy in terms of what it needs from foreign components. It is not and will not be an object for trade," Ganzouri said.

He said Egypt's foreign debt stood at \$28.1 billion this year from \$28.8 billion last year. "This is a very limited burden... Short-term loans are only six per cent of that figure and 75 per cent are rescheduled for payment by 2029," he said.

Ganzouri said local debt was 49 per cent of GDP, comfortably below an internationally accepted rate of 60 per cent.

OECD sees less interventionist mood among Asian governments

PARIS (AFP) — Asian governments are taking a more balanced view of their role in the financial markets in the wake of the regional financial crisis, OECD and World Bank officials said here Wednesday.

It was clear from comments by Asian delegates at a seminar here on securities markets in emerging economies that there have been some "major paradigm shifts" in the view of the government's role since the Asian crisis, Hans Blommestein, head of the OECD's financial affairs

division, told a news conference.

In the past, governments tended to see their role as one of intervention in markets when they saw something happening they did not like, rather than acting as a catalyst to ensure healthy development of a debt market, Blommestein said.

But it was clear this week that they "have come closer to what is common policy thinking in the OECD," that governments should act as a "catalyst" and regulator to ensure development of a broad-based,

healthy and transparent debt market, OECD and World Bank officials said.

"Nobody suggested that capital controls were an appropriate policy response" to financial problems, Blommestein said. But Malaysia, one Asian country which has suggested such moves to protect its economy, was not represented at the three-day seminar here.

Participants agreed that governments have a key role to play in developing strong financial markets, but the crucial issue is defining that role.

Governments should be in the securities market both as an issuer of bonds and a regulator of the debt market because a government which is also a mar-

ket player will be closer to the market and react more quickly to the need for any changes to its operation, said Clemente de Valle Borraez of the World Bank.

At the same time, the existence of zero risk government debt instruments establishes a yield curve and makes risk assessment easier, said Borraez, principal financial specialist in the bank's capital markets department.

The absence of such instruments in several Asian markets made it difficult for investors to assess the correct pricing and risk levels for private debt instruments on offer.

Government must take care not to "crowd out" other operators in the debt

market, as a wide spread of instruments and maturities is also a key to a healthy market, officials said.

The need for strong, transparent debt markets in emerging economies is all the greater because of their traditional high dependency on foreign capital, the officials said.

The Russian financial crisis, for example, had sparked a liquidity problem even in the U.S. market, said Paul Malvey, associate director of the U.S. Treasury market finance office, who chaired the three-day seminar here.

"Trading in outstanding issues was virtually moribund" and new debt issues ground to a halt in the U.S. market, Malvey said.

ASEAN leaders move to get recovery under way

HANOI (AFP) — Southeast Asian leaders approved a combination of immediate and medium-term measures Wednesday to spur trade and investment flows and promote closer economic cohesion into the next century.

Plans spelled out by the Association of

South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) at the end of a two-day summit here also marked their first coordinated effort at the highest level to breathe new life into comatose regional economies.

Sultan Hassanah Bolkiah of Brunei said the programmes reflected ASEAN's "strong

determination to regain business confidence, enhance economic recovery and promote growth."

"All of these will give new momentum to the region's growth and development," he said.

ASEAN leaders adopted a Hanoi Action Plan spelling out economic measures the group intends to take in the six years to 2004 to create an integrated market of more than 500 million consumers.

Separately, they gave the green light to a package of "bold measures" including accelerated tariff cuts and incentives such as tax breaks to attract foreign investors.

Exchange Rates Wednesday, 16-12-98

CURRENCY	JORDAN	US DOLLAR	EURO	UK POUND	SWISS FRANC	GERMAN MARK	FRANCE FRANC	ITALY LIRA	SPAIN PESA	NETHERLAND GILDER	PORTUGAL ESCUDO	GREEK DRACHMA	CYPRUS POUND	AUSTRIA SCHILLING	CANADA DOLLAR	EURO
JORDAN DINAR	1.0000	0.1885	0.1927	1.8778	1.8390	0.1944	2.3405	0.2077	0.7080							
SAUDI RIYAL	5.3044	1.0000	1.0222	9.8907	9.7545	1.0313	12.4149	1.1017	3.7555							
U.A.E. DIRHAM	5.1883	0.8783	1.0000	9.7446	9.5428	1.0089	12.1455	1.0778	3.6740							
BAHRAIN DINAR	0.5329	0.1004	0.1028	1.0000	0.9793	0.1035	1.2464	0.1106	0.3710							
QATAR RIYAL	0.5438	0.1025	0.1048	1.0211	1.0000	0.1057	1.2727	0.1129	0.3850							
QATAR RIYAL	5.1434	0.9896	0.9912	9.8584	9.4584	1.0000	12.0380	1.0683	3.6415							
KUWAIT DINAR	0.4273	0.0805	0.0823	0.8023	0.7887	0.0831	1.0000	0.0887	0.3025							
EGYPT POUND	4.8145	0.9077	0.9278	9.0409	8.8538	0.9381	11.2854	1.0000	3.4087							
LIBANON LIRA	21.4831	4.0501	4.1389	40.3416	39.5085	4.1769	50.2810	4.4821	15.2100							
US DOLLAR	1.4124	0.2563	0.2722	2.5233	2.5974	0.2748	3.3058	0.2934	1.0000							
BRITISH STERLING	0.5402	0.1584	0.1619	1.5777	1.5451	0.1634	1.9684	0.1745	0.5948							
GERMAN MARK	2.3404	0.4412	0.4510	4.3949	4.3039	0.4550	5.4777	0.4981	1.5570							
FRANCE FRANC	1.8907	0.3564	0.3643	3.5504	3.4769	0.3676	4.4251	0.3927	1.3380							
ITALY LIRA	7.8540	1.4807	1.5135	14.7484	14.4431	1.5270	18.3821	1.8313	5.9605							
NETHERLAND GILDER	1.8374	0.3087	0.3155	3.0748	3.0112	0.3184	3.8324	0.3401	1.1593							
PORTUGAL ESCUDO	2.6381	0.4974	0.5084	4.9540	4.8514	0.5129	6.1745	0.5480	1.8678							
SPAIN PESA	11.3092	2.1320	2.1793	21.2368	20.7971	2.1888	26.4891	2.5490	8.0059							
GREEK DRACHMA	23.1744	4.3689	4.4658	43.5178	42.8169	4.4507	54.2397	4.8134	16.4075							
CYPRUS POUND	48.2726	9.1025	9.3224	90.8480	88.7714	9.3954	112.8818	10.0284	34.1770							
AUSTRIA SCHILLING	2.2591	0.4272	0.4387	4.2553	4.1672	0.4308	5.3037	0.4707	1.6044							
CANADA DOLLAR	3.5270	0.7403	0.7568	7.3742	7.2216	0.7636	9.1911	0.8156	2.7803							
EURO	2.6836	0.5059	0.5171	5.0384	4.9351	0.5218	6.2810	0.5574	1.9006							
NETHERLAND GILDER	16.4746	3.1058	3.1747	30.8385	30.2981	3.2031	38.5587	3.4218	11.6640							
ITALY LIRA	2.1771	0.4104	0.4195	4.0883	4.0036	0.4233	5.0955	0.4522	1.5414							
EURO	1.1914	0.2246	0.2299	2.2373	2.1910	0.2316	2.7885	0.2475	0.8435							

CURRENCY	JORDAN	US DOLLAR	EURO	UK POUND	SWISS FRANC	GERMAN MARK	FRANCE FRANC	ITALY LIRA	SPAIN PESA	NETHERLAND GILDER	PORTUGAL ESCUDO	GREEK DRACHMA	CYPRUS POUND	AUSTRIA SCHILLING	CANADA DOLLAR	EURO
US DOLLAR	1.0000	1.8811	0.8035	0.7470	0.1798	0.8028	0.5354	6.0948	1.1855							
BRITISH STERLING	0.5948	1.0000	0.3590	0.4444	0.1070	0.5131	0.3125	3.6256	0.7052							
GERMAN MARK	1.8570	2.7856	1.0000	1.2379	0.2860	1.4283	0.8871	10.0890	1.9644							
FRANCE FRANC	1.3380	2.2503	0.8078	1.0000	0.2407	1.1547	0.7187	8.1585	1.5889							
ITALY LIRA	5.9605	9.3479	3.3558	4.1540	1.0000	4.7988	2.8771	33.8856	6.9221							
NETHERLAND GILDER	115.9300	184.8989	69.9638	86.8054	20.8405	1.0000	62.0877	768.5711	137.4350							
PORTUGAL ESCUDO	1.8578	3.1400	1.1272	1.3853	0.3359	1.5111	1.0000	11.3638	2.2143							
GREEK DRACHMA	8.0059	13.4804	4.8322	5.9815	1.4308	6.9067	4.2968	48.9022	9.4922							
ITALY LIRA	18.4075	27.5826	9.9018	12.2572	2.9007	14.1529	8.7844	1.0000	19.4511							
NETHERLAND GILDER	34.1770	57.4550	20.8288	25.6319	6.1463	28.4807	18.2880	208.3011	40.5168							
AUSTRIA SCHILLING	1.8044	2.8971	0.9892	1.1985	0.2885	1.3839	0.8590	9.7782	1.9020							
GREEK DRACHMA	2.7803	4.6740	1.6779	2.0770	0.5000	2.9953	1.4488	16.8455	3.2982							
CYPRUS POUND	1.8000	3.1941	1.1487	1.4154	0.3417	1.5383	1.0172	11.5601	2.2353							
AUSTRIA SCHILLING	11.8840	19.8094	7.0282	8.7136	2.0976	10.0612	6.2446	71.0884	13.8277							
CANADA DOLLAR	1.5414	2.5912	0.9802	1.1515	0.2772	1.3296	0.8252	9.3845	1.8273							
EURO	0.8435	1.4181	0.5091	0.6302	0.1517	0.7278	0.4516	5.1411	1.0000							

MAJOR CURRENCIES AGAINST JORDAN DINAR

CURRENCY	JORDAN	US DOLLAR	EURO	UK POUND	SWISS FRANC	GERMAN MARK	FRANCE FRANC	ITALY LIRA	SPAIN PESA	NETHERLAND GILDER	PORTUGAL ESCUDO	GREEK DRACHMA	CYPRUS POUND	AUSTRIA SCHILLING	CANADA DOLLAR	EURO
US DOLLAR	1.0000	1.8811	0.8035	0.7470	0.1798	0.8028	0.5354	6.0948	1.1855							
BRITISH STERLING	0.5948	1.0000	0.3590	0.4444	0.1070	0.5131	0.3125	3.6256	0.7052							
GERMAN MARK	1.8570	2.7856	1.0000	1.2379	0.2860	1.4283	0.8871	10.0890	1.9644							
FRANCE FRANC	1.3380	2.2503	0.8078	1.0000	0.2407	1.1547	0.7187	8.1585	1.5889							
ITALY LIRA	5.9605	9.3479	3.3558	4.1540	1.0000	4.7988	2.8771	33.8856	6.9221							
NETHERLAND GILDER	115.9300	184.8989	69.9638	86.8054	20.8405	1.0000	62.0877	768.5711	137.4350							
PORTUGAL ESCUDO	1.8578	3.1400	1.1272	1.3853	0.3359	1.5111	1.0000	11.3638	2.2143							
GREEK DRACHMA	8.0059	13.4804	4.8322	5.9815	1.4308	6.9067	4.2968	48.9022	9.4922							
ITALY LIRA	18.4075	27.5826	9.9018	12.2572	2.9007	14.1529	8.7844	1.0000	19.4511							
NETHERLAND GILDER	34.1770	57.4550	20.8288	25.6319	6.1463	28.4807	18.2880	208.3011	40.5168							
AUSTRIA SCHILLING	1.8044	2.8971	0.9892	1.1985	0.2885	1.3839	0.8590	9.7782	1.9020							
GREEK DRACHMA	2.7803	4.6740	1.6779	2.0770	0.5000	2.9953	1.4488	16.8455	3.2982							
CYPRUS POUND	1.8000	3.1941	1.1487	1.4154	0.3417	1.5383	1.0172	11.5601	2.2353							
AUSTRIA SCHILLING	11.8840	19.8094	7.0282	8.7136	2.0976	10.0612	6.2446	71.0884	13.8277							
CANADA DOLLAR	1.5414	2.5912	0.9802	1.1515	0.2772	1.3296	0.8252	9.3845	1.8273							
EURO	0.8435	1.4181	0.5091	0.6302	0.1517	0.7278	0.4516	5.1411	1.0000							

CENTRAL BANK BULLETIN

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DEPOSIT INTEREST PRICES

CSJIA

CURRENCY	1 M	3 M	6 M	1 YEAR
US DOLLAR	5.5000	4.5000	4.5000	4.6000
BRITISH STERLING	6.2200	6.0000	5.7800	5.4400
FRANCE FRANC	3.1250	3.0025	3.0135	2.9375
GERMAN MARK	3.1250	3.0025	3.0000	2.9375
NETHERLAND FRANC	1.2600	1.2500	1.2515	1.2500
JAPAN YEN	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000

CURRENCY	ASK	BID
US DOLLAR	0.7000	0.7100
BRITISH STERLING	1.1915	1.1975
GERMAN MARK	0.4250	0.4250
NETHERLAND FRANC	0.2000	0.2000
FRANCE FRANC	0.1275	0.1275
JAPAN YEN	0.0004	0.0114
HOLLAND GILDER	0.3750	0.3850
PORTUGAL ESCUDO	0.0000	0.0000
EURO	0.8300	0.8412

Daily Beat

A review of news from the Arabic Press

'High profitability of banks reflects negatively on the economies of the region represents barrier to activating investments'

**** ACCORDING TO** Kemal Dervis, vice president for the Middle East and North Africa at the World Bank, countries in the region implementing economic adjustment and restructuring programmes should strive to achieve a growth rate of no less than 5.5 per cent a year to face population growth and counter poverty and unemployment.

Speaking during the regional journalists' workshop held in Cairo recently, Dervis indicated that major and real difficulties face the development plans of the Middle East countries which have recorded low growth rate. He called for continued efforts, higher productivity and improved investment climate as they are the bases for progress and development.

The senior World Bank official said the Middle East region was not affected directly by the Asian crisis which, however, had some impact on the oil producing countries with respect to lower demand for oil from South East Asia. Dervis indicated that the growth rate in average for the Middle East and North Africa was about 3.4 per cent in 1997. The growth rate in the Arab Gulf oil countries did not exceed the 2.7 per cent level compared to an average growth of around 4.4 per cent for non-oil countries, the senior World Bank official explained.

Praising the non-oil countries which adopt a diversified production base, Dervis said the decline in oil prices has grossly damaged the plans and programmes of oil countries and negatively reflected on their growth. He highlighted both the poverty and the unemployment as being the most pressing challenges for the region. "Coordination between the education and training programmes, on the one hand, and the requirements of the market, on

the other, would contribute to finding a way to remedy these phenomena," he stressed.

John Page, chief economist for the Middle East and North Africa, told the journalists from Algeria, Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, the West Bank and Gaza and the United Kingdom that Arab countries should open up more to the world and that it is not enough to concentrate on group accords and the Arab Free Trade Zone. However, Page stressed that working through a regional context is important if it can bring benefits and openness to the work like the European experience.

He indicated that inter-Arab trade has increased if oil exports are excluded. Furthermore, he highlighted the need to reduce customs duties between Arab states, to remove trade barriers and to curb routine and bureaucracy in order to boost inter-Arab trade. Page estimated inter-Arab trade (excluding oil) to be about 19 per cent of the total trade volume of the countries in the region.

Noting that the banking sector's contribution in the gross domestic product is weak, Page said the countries of the region need fewer privately-owned banks with large capital. The banks should provide comprehensive services to be able to compete with international banking giants coming to the region within the framework of globalisation.

He pointed out that the profitability of the banks in the region is high as a result of the high cost of financing. "This high profitability of banks reflects negatively on the economies of the region in general and represents a barrier to activating investments," Page concluded (Al Ra'i + Al Dustour + Al Arab Al Yawm).

Citigroup to cut 10,400 jobs

NEW YORK (R) — Citigroup Inc., the newly formed financial services giant that is wrestling to integrate its businesses, said Tuesday it would cut 10,400 jobs, or six per cent of its global work force, and take a restructuring charge of \$900 million.

The company, formed by the recent merger of banking group Citicorp and financial services firm Travelers Group, said 35 per cent of the job cuts, or about 3,650, would come in its U.S. operations.

The company previously said it might cut around 8,000 jobs, or five per cent of its 160,000-strong global work force, by year-end.

The higher-than-expected job cuts and the after-tax restructuring charge — the bulk of which will be recorded in the fourth quarter — come as Citigroup is working to integrate its businesses, which vary from selling mutual funds and insurance policies to marketing credit cards and making loans.

"The job cuts are slightly higher than expected but that's a function of what's going on in the markets — a lot of business lines are not doing as well," said banking industry analyst Michael Ancell of Edward Jones.

"They are moving as rapidly as they can to achieve cost savings because revenues are not

going to come through as they had hoped."

News of the restructuring measures helped push up Citigroup's stock price by \$2.25, to \$48.31, in afternoon trading on the New York Stock Exchange.

Merging its businesses has already led to the departure of several top Citigroup executives, including President Jamie Dimon, who headed the group's Salomon Smith Barney securities unit.

After Citigroup's profits fell 53 per cent to \$729 million in the third quarter due to global market turmoil, the company had been expected to shuffle its management and restructure its businesses.

Citigroup said it expects the restructuring to save it \$680 million on a pre-tax basis next year. It is targeting additional savings of \$975 million annually by the year 2000, including \$525 million from its consumer business, \$350 million from corporate banking, and \$100 million from streamlining its asset management division and staff functions.

"The numbers are a little better than I expected as far as cost savings, so that's a positive," Ancell said. "The jury is still out on the integration of the company but it does show they are seeing some tangible benefits on the expense side."

In its consumer busi-

nesses, which includes retail banking and insurance, Citigroup said it plans to eliminate management layers, consolidate back office operations and integrate overlapping marketing units.

On the corporate banking side, which includes Salomon Smith Barney and Citibank's corporate bankers, the company aims to consolidate offices and trading rooms and jettison certain businesses.

The company said merging its operations had already led to cross-selling opportunities. Travelers has sold 3,000 car and homeowner insurance policies through Citibank's credit card business, it said.

Mideast cooperation bank folds before official opening

CAIRO (AFP) — The Bank for Economic Cooperation and Development in the Middle East and North Africa, dubbed the jewel of regional cooperation, is closing its offices Thursday, even before its official opening, officials said Wednesday.

"The bank's very existence is closely linked to the (Arab-Israeli) peace process which is now facing difficulties and the United States is the key shareholder, but the U.S. Congress refused for the third consecutive year to unblock funds for the bank," said transitional team member Lorenzo Savorelli.

"So we are closing our offices on Thursday although initially we expected to open for business on Jan. 1, 1999," the Italian economist told AFP from Menabank headquarters in a Cairo tower overlooking the Nile River.

"We are very sad because we are convinced that this bank is necessary for the region, and we worked hard to set it up," Savorelli said.

Plans for the bank were announced at the first Middle East and North Africa conference in Casablanca in 1994, and it was formally set up in Amman in 1995.

The bank was aimed at developing economic cooperation in the Middle East in conjunction with Arab-Israeli peace efforts and was supposed to get \$5 billion in capital.

Seventy-five per cent of the bank's capital was spoken for and distributed among 19 countries of which the United States held the

biggest stake, 21 per cent, followed by Japan with 9.5 per cent and Russia with six per cent.

Egypt, Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian National Authority were to each own four per cent.

The other shareholders were Algeria, Austria, Canada, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, Morocco, the Netherlands, South Korea, Tunisia and Turkey.

The remaining 24.5 per cent was set aside for countries such as Britain, France and Germany and the Arab Gulf monarchies, which expressed reservations over the project.

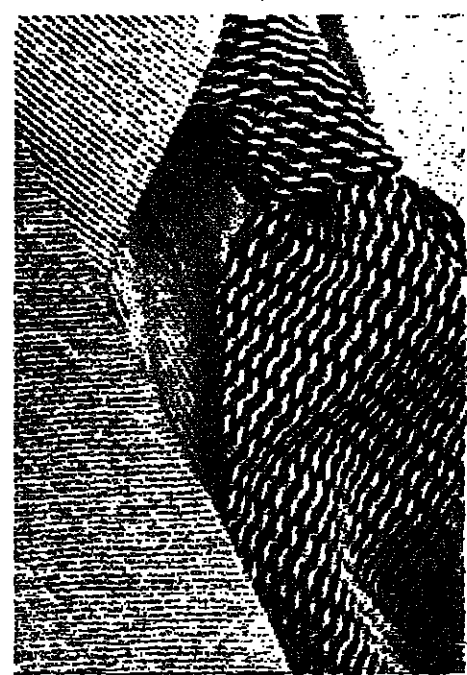
"At the end of the summer we realised that the U.S. Congress, once again, would refuse to finance its share of the capital and that we should therefore freeze our activities," Savorelli said.

Savorelli said the transitional team had prepared a 600-page report detailing the bank's policies, future operations and goals based on the European Regional Development Bank, which would be given to the 19 partners.

The Italian expert said he was packing up and going back to work for the World Bank in Washington next week. An Israeli colleague left this week and a Japanese expert was also getting ready to return to Tokyo.

Everyone who worked on the transitional team has found a new job except for Hisham, the office boy whose task was to provide the architects of elusive regional cooperation with tea and coffee each day.

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HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR FRIDAY, DECEMBER 18, 1998

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) Conditions are excellent for voyages of the mind as well as the body. If you can't travel, at least start new projects. Just about anything you think of today will be successful. Its even a good day to form a business partnership or get married. If you're trying to set a land speed record, try it again. You'll be fast as greased lightning.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) You've put in a hard week's work, and this day is kind of a wrap-up. There are still decisions to be made, risks to be taken, treasures to be discovered and possibly an unexpected expense to deal with. That's OK. You're great under those conditions. If you've set up the game so you'll win, you have nothing to worry about.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) Yours is a very intellectual sign, and a very argumentative one. Today, there's no point in arguing. Another person has you convinced you're better off just to watch the show. Looks like somebody you respect and admire is performing brilliantly. Its partly because of the attention you're paying, by the way. Keep up the good work.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 22) You've been going full speed ahead for the last several days. There's relief coming, although it may take until tomorrow to get here. That's like knowing the cavalry's coming to the rescue, but its still 500 miles away. Don't despair. Help will come in the form of someone who can take part of the load.

LEO: (July 23 to August 22) You're getting a lot of good attention. You're brilliant, you're responsible, you're making things happen. You're effective and you're powerful. You're the star of the show! And you don't even know it, because you're paying so much attention to the other people in your life. That's one of the things that's making you look so good.

VIRGO: (August 23 to September 22) You're just about to complete something you've been working on for days. You're active.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 23) You can do just about anything, but one of your problems is that you lack patience. You're about to get bored with some of the

things you've taken on this week, so finish up quickly. You're still learning very well today, and that gives you the edge. You're performing at a much higher level than you were before. Isn't it fun?

SCORPIO: (October 24 to November 21) You have more ways to make money, and that's good. You have lots of ways to spend the money, and that's OK, too. The one inspires the other. You can easily buy everything you need for the next few weeks with a little planning and training. Or you can fret over whether you're doing it right. It's up to you.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) Just about anything you do today will turn out well. You could even try something you failed at before, and win this time. That's especially true in romance. That same old line will work again, even on a person who's heard it a thousand times. There's lots of different kinds of love, but today old love is definitely the best.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 19) The deadlines are still looming. There's more stuff than you can get accomplished by the end of the day. That's OK. You're going to have a huge burst of energy this afternoon, or sometime during the day. You'll feel like you've kicked into hyperspeed. Everything will be handled by the time you're through, so don't worry.

AQUARIUS: (January 20 to February 18) You love your friends dearly. You love to devote yourself to making sure they're healthy, safe and whatever else they need to be. In other words, you're a fixer. Well, today, the tables are turned. Your friends are going to be fixing something for you. Isn't that nice of them? Just relax and let them.

PISCES: (February 19 to March 20) You're drawing quite a bit of attention. No need to be shy. You're doing better than you thought you could, and probably better than you think you are. You tend to overlook your own magnificence and focus on your shortcomings. That's a nasty habit to get into, because it interferes with your fun. You've got what it takes, so flaunt it.

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Asian Games

Farran misses bronze after injury

Najjar competes in discus today

By Aileen Bannayan in Amman and Jordan sports media reporters in Bangkok

JORDAN'S KHALIL Farran Wednesday lost the chance to add a bronze medal after the recurrence of a recent injury as he competed in the karate event at the 13th Asian Games, which conclude in Bangkok Dec. 20.

Farran competed alongside 12 players taking sixth place. "I would have done better but I had a really bad cramp," Farran said following the end of Wednesday's events.

Teammate Butheina Mahsiri, a Pan-Arab Games bronze medalist, had finished fifth among nine players in the opening day of the karate event.

On Thursday, Jordan resumes competition in the athletics event when Tareq Najjar competes in the discus hoping to better his own personal time of 52.60 metres.

The only remaining medal hopeful in the athletics competition is Fakhreddin Fuad, who will compete Friday. A high jump gold medalist at the Pan-Arab Games, Fuad achieved 215 centimetres, and just came short of his record of 222 at the team's training camp in Qatar.

Teammate Mohammad Abdul Baqi bettered his own record by 18 centimetres in Qatar setting a new Jordanian record in the triple jump with 15.53.

Jordan is yet to win gold at the Asian Games. In the past two participations in the Seoul '86 and Hiroshima '94, Jordan's sole medals were achieved through taekwondo with three silver and five bronze medals.

The Kingdom has so far won five medals. Four in taekwondo including silver by Ibrahim Agel, Ala' Kurkut, and Hussein Tahleh and bronze by Mohammad Farajeh. Mohammad Abu Khadijeh added a bronze in boxing.

Abu Khadijeh, who lost the heavy-weight semifinal to a Pakistani boxer, Wednesday told reporters that there were many factors related to his unexpected defeat after being cited as a gold medal hopeful.

"My opponent was not qualified to beat me. I am still reviewing the videotape of my bout and I want to forget that match. I had defeated better opponents recently," said Abu Khadijeh.

Jordan has nearly completed participation in the three-week event where the Kingdom had 19 officials and 37 athletes in 11 sports: athletics, boxing,

bowling, gymnastics, judo, karate, shooting, squash, swimming, weightlifting and taekwondo.

Only Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan missed the Games as 41 countries took part in the last sporting event of the century.

Although the Jordan Olympic Committee (JOC) tried to enlist the best athletes in each sport through a screening process, apart from taekwondo, the rest of the sports produced below average results especially in athletics and swimming where athletes' finishing times did not even match their own records.

A brief look at Jordan's participation shows the Kingdom easily eliminated in the bowling and shooting events.

In athletics, Mohammad Shaman and Mohammad Mutari were eliminated from the 800 metres.

Mutari came short of his Jordanian time and finished the event with a time of 1:55.20 while Shaman finished with a time of 1:55.22.

Mutari had earlier competed in the 1,500 metres finishing with a time of 3:59.30 short of his own 3:47.9.

In the 400 metres, Shaman also came short of his own best time of 48.28 finishing last with a time of 49.64.

In swimming, Hana Majaj lagged far behind her local records finishing last in the 200-metre butterfly with a time of 2:40.85 while her local time was 2:26.00.

Pan-Arab Games bronze medalist Majaj also came in 18th with a time of 1:13.16 in the 100-metre butterfly, also way off her local time.

In boxing, Jordan's top boxer Abu Khadijeh settled for bronze, after having won three gold medals within a year — at the 8th Pan-Arab Games, the West Asian Games in Tehran and the 18th Arab Boxing Championships.

Basel Hindawi, bronze medalist at the Pan-Arab Games, and gold medalist Ayman Nadi failed to earn medals for Jordan as they competed alongside 180 athletes from 31 nations in the event.

In squash, the country's top player Mohammad Saeed lost to Pakistan's top player — Zarak Khan.

In taekwondo, Nancy Hindi, Zaha Talhoum, Luma Abu Judum, Ali Asmar, Alisar Matar, Mohammad Abul Ruz and Ahlam Bino lost their bouts. The rest of their teammates secured four medals.

In judo, Mousa Khalaf, a silver medalist at the Pan-Arab Games, was eliminated, alongside Rami Dasouqi

and Tawfiq Suleiman.

In gymnastics, Jordan's Ahmad Abdo and Shadi Khouri obtained 45th and 47th places respectively.

In weightlifting, Awad Aboudi competed in the heavyweight over 105-kilogramme class managing overall eighth place beating Arab competitors from Kuwait, Syria and Lebanon.

On the other hand, the country's top weightlifter, Ayed Khawaldeh became the first athlete to test positive at the Bangkok Games after setting a new Arab record finishing seventh among fifteen participants in the 56-kilogramme class.

The Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) reprimanded the Jordan Olympic Committee after Khawaldeh was found to have taken the diuretic Triamterene in a random test following which he was immediately disqualified and expelled from the Games Village.

The OCA handed the matter to the sport's governing body to impose an international suspension which will bar him from the Pan-Arab Games.

Khawaldeh also failed a second positive test before Jordanian delegation officials ordered his return home.

Khawaldeh, who was the first Jordanian to win three bronze medals in one event at the 8th Pan-Arab Games in Beirut last summer, said his Chinese coach has instructed him to take the medicine during the West Asian Games in Tehran and during another championship in Algeria last year, and did not know that it contained a banned substance.

The Kingdom did not taking part in team sports — notably soccer, handball and basketball due to reasons pertaining to their respective federations.

The JOC has underlined the importance of taking part in the Asian Games saying it was "an invaluable chance to assess our teams and pinpoint our location on the map of Asian sports being part of plans of the Ministry of Culture and Youth to prepare teams for the upcoming Pan-Arab Games in Amman next summer and the 2000 Sydney Olympics."

Supercoach Ma missed by everyone except China

BANGKOK (AFP) — Athletics super-coach Ma Junren is sorely missed at the Asian Games by everyone — except the Chinese athletics establishment with whom he is at loggerheads again.

With Ma's Army of runners, now led by 5,000m world record holder Jiang Bo and Dong Jiamen, forced into internal exile after failing to compete in China's qualification meetings, the country's hopes in the long distance races have been devastated.

Yuko Kawakami of Japan won the women's 10,000m race 17.5 seconds ahead of Chinese entrant Zheng Guixia.

Rival coaches in Bangkok say the Asian Games athletics is suffering without Ma, who sprang to fame in 1993 when his middle and long distance runners — fuelled by a concoction including fresh turtle's blood — dominated the world championships and smashed world records.

Yasunori Hamada, Japan's national athletics coach, said the medals his runners have won in Bangkok have been demeaned by the absence of Ma's and China's best runners.

"Personally, I'm very disappointed. Japan has sent its best athletes even though it's the end of the season. We consider the Asian Games very important."

"We took pains to get our best athletes together here. We care about winning and losing but without the best runners we are not happy."

"But I'm not in a position to discuss the selection policies of other countries."

Chinese sports authorities have made it clear however that they believe Ma is too much of a star for their liking.

When asked whether about Ma's absence, Wu Shouzhong, deputy secretary general of the Chinese Olympic Committee said: "We regret it and we don't regret it."



China's Zhao Junzhe (L) tackles Iran's K. Homamdadali during semifinal football action at the 13th Asian Games in Bangkok. Iran won 1-0 to advance to the finals (AFP photo)

LOCAL SPORTS SCENE



Prince Abdullah opens Games headquarters

AMMAN — HRH Prince Abdullah, head of the 9th Pan-Arab Games' Higher Organising Committee, will Thursday inaugurate the permanent headquarters of the Games at Al Hassan Squash Centre. The Prince will also head a committee meeting, as the first official function of the headquarters. Minister of Youth Talal Sata'an Al Hassan will give a comprehensive presentation on recent developments in the past three months regarding preparations for the Games which will be held here Aug. 15-31, 1999.

Swimming federation to hold camp in Egypt

AMMAN — The Jordan Swimming Federation (JSF) in conjunction with Arab and Egyptian federations on Wednesday decided to hold a training camp in Egypt for the national team during Jan. 10-20, 1999. The federation also reviewed recent amendments to the Olympic swimming pool, currently under construction. It was agreed that the pool be equipped with electronic timing equipment so that it will be accredited as an official Olympic-size in addition to the diving pool which will be amended in line with international laws. The JSF is also discussed plans to cover the pool for use all-year long.

Cyclists to train in Baghdad

AMMAN — The Jordan Cycling Federation (JCF) will hold a two-week training camp for the national team in Baghdad, starting Jan. 26, 1999 after a similar one Egypt was recently cancelled. Meanwhile, the JCF noted the postponed Arab Cycling Championship in Egypt which will be held in February 1999.

New sports facilities discussed

KAFRAIN — A joint team from the Ministry of Culture and Youth and the Armed Forces Wednesday paid an inspection tour to Marka, Tabarbour and Kafraim areas in order to study the possibility of constructing sports facilities there. The facilities will include constructing a sports city in Tabarbour and a soccer and polo stadiums as well as youth training camps in Kafraim, in the Jordan Valley. The venues will serve sports clubs of the Armed Forces and other official institutions. Joint Committees will be formed to supervise the projects.

Compiled By Ahmad Khatib

Iran, Kuwait reach final

BANGKOK (AP) — Iran and Kuwait set up a Middle East final in Asian Games soccer with victories Wednesday.

Iran won 1-0 against a Chinese side weakened by the absence of its star striker and coach. Kuwait scored less than 30 seconds into the game and went on to beat Thailand 3-0 in its semifinal.

The Kuwait victory stunned a crowd that overflowed the 60,000-seat Ratchamongkhal Stadium, blocking corridors and emergency exits. Riot police stood by.

English soccer great Sir Bobby Charlton was part of the crowd to cheer on his good friend Peter Withe, the Thai coach, while Kuwait's top official — Olympic Council of Asia President Sheikh Ahmad Al Sabah — cheered on his team.

Thailand reached the semifinals with a golden goal from its last kick of its quarterfinal against favored South Korea, but its hopes of a gold medal soured even before it touched the ball in the semifinal against Kuwait.

In the opening semifinal, the Chinese exhibited more control at midfield than in their previous 2-1 defeat against Iran in a group decider last Friday.

The defeat leaves the Chinese still unavenged for the Iranian victory that kept China out of the World Cup finals. The first half ended scoreless, with the Chinese containing Bayern Munich striker Ali Daei, at one point bringing him down twice deep in their territory in the space of 30 seconds.

Daei drew a yellow card in the 18th minute, eliciting boos to the referee from Iranian fans who were constantly in action, beating tambourines and dancing.

In the second half, Daei showed why he is considered such a threat after scoring eight goals leading up to the semifinals.

In the fourth minute, he played a 15-metre free kick directly at the feet of Sayed Ali Mosavi-Hasanzadeh, who shot at point blank range on Chinese goalie Jiang Jin. The ball bounced straight back at Mosavi and he launched it again, this time beating Jiang.

Tough new clamp down foils drug cheats

BANGKOK (AFP) — New tough anti-drug measures by national sports federations have lowered the num-

ber of drug cheats at the Asian Games, a senior doctor said here on Wednesday. So far only one athlete,

25-year-old Jordanian weightlifter Ayed Khawaldeh Jassar, has tested positive. He was expelled from the Games.

Four years ago in Hiroshima 15 drug cheats caught from the 700 tested. "Maybe the controls imposed by the various

national Olympic committees helped," said Ruengsak Siriphol, chairman of the Games sub-committee on health and medical services. "I know Thailand threw out athletes who had taken banned drugs and I hear other countries did the same," he said.

China, who had 11 athletes caught for drug abuse at Hiroshima, conducted tests on athletes well in advance of the Games.

Siriphol added that all the 1,800 women who underwent gender tests had passed, unlike the 1990 Beijing Games when an Indian hockey player failed the test and was thrown out.

Sheikh Ahmed Al-Sabah of Kuwait, the president of the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA), said the low doping cases underlined the sports administration's determination to eradicate drugs.

"We are doing everything to stop cheating," the Sheikh said. "I hope this will be the last case."

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BANGKOK ASIAN GAMES

Japan leads all-time medal tally

BANGKOK (AP) — While China has emerged as the continent's sports colossus, Japan still leads in the all-time gold medal race of the Asian Games. Thanks to politics.

As of early Wednesday, the Japanese had picked up 673 golds in 12 games, while China had collected 559. But China's radical Communist policies shut it out of the first six games, giving Japan a big head start.

South Korea is third on the gold medal chart. The most crushing domination of golds came at the 4th games in 1962, when Japan took 54 to nearest rival India's seven. The most humiliating games for the Japanese were those in Seoul, when they suffered their worst ever gold medal result compared to China. At that 1986 event, China tallied 183 to Japan's 38.

Looking at the bottom end of the chart, Laos is the only country to have won just one medal, a silver at the 1990 Beijing games. And looking off the chart, Bhutan, Yemen, Palestine and the Maldives have yet to win a single medal.

Singapore's N.C. Kok is listed as the first gold medalist. He won the 1,500-metre freestyle event at the inaugural 1951 games in New Delhi.

'England still a 2006 contender'

LONDON (AFP) — Temporary Football Association (FA) supremo David Davies vowed on Wednesday that England's bid to host the 2006 World Cup finals will not be affected by the crisis at the top of the domestic game.

Davies has promised to maintain the campaign despite the resignation of FA chief executive Graham Kelly and a vote of no-confidence in chairman Keith Wiseman on Tuesday night.

Kelly and Wiseman failed to convince the FA executive committee that they were right to offer a 3.2 million pound loan or grant to the Football Association of Wales (FAW).

It has been alleged that the loan was linked to the FAW supporting Wiseman's unsuccessful attempt to join the FIFA executive — and that Wiseman and Kelly offered the money without prior consultation with FA committees.

"It is clearly unhelpful at this time, but the fact of the matter is that (2006 World Cup campaign boss) Alex McGivern and Sir Bobby Charlton are in Thailand furthering a World Cup bid which was launched 18 months ago, and all the evidence is it is going

very well," said Davies. "Ultimately the bid will be decided on where are the best facilities, which is the country that could stage the World Cup best — and FIFA have said that only last night."

Davies also rejected claims that the crisis at the FA is a gift to Germany and South Africa, who are fighting to host the World Cup bid themselves.

"Germany have had their problems as well; South Africa have had their problems. We will overcome this, and I notice today that Franz Beckenbauer is heading Germany's bid. Well, Sir Bobby Charlton, Sir Geoff Hurst and Gary Lineker have been travelling the world on behalf of the FA in recent times," he said.

There are fears, though, that the mood of uncertainty caused by Wiseman's refusal to quit will further damage the reputation of English football.

Davies said: "No-one would pretend the situation is other than difficult. The fact of the matter is we have Christmas coming up and then the new year, and this matter will be resolved very quickly after that. The chairman's situation will be discussed fully at an FA

council meeting on January 4."

With the search on for a successor to Kelly, Davies' name has cropped up among a list of contenders.

But he played a straight bat to questions, saying: "I am delighted with some of the speculation of my former colleagues in the media. The fact of the matter is this has come as a big surprise to me as it did to everybody over the past 48 hours and I have not thought about it. That cannot be a priority to somebody like me."

Rick Parry, a former head of the Premier League and currently Liverpool's chief executive, is considered one of Davies' possible rivals for Kelly's job but said Wednesday that he is not interested in the post.

Asked whether he has any intention of putting himself up as a future FA chief executive, he said: "No. I am not. I have my dream job. thank you."

Quebec feeling cheated from 2002 Games

TORONTO (AP) — Members of the delegation for Quebec City's 2002 Winter Olympics bid feel betrayed in light of the scandal surrounding the successful bid by Salt Lake City.

"You have to be disappointed when you realise that not all the players were playing by the same rules," Quebec City 2002 bid chief Rene Paquet said. "It's really unfortunate."

Quebec City lost out to its American rival for the 2002 Games. The vote wasn't close, but it since has been revealed that Salt Lake City used nefarious means of winning the favor of some International Olympic Committee members.

A \$500,000 "humanitarian aid" programme was set up by the Salt Lake City bid committee, part of which paid for the education of six relatives of IOC members.

One has been identified as Sonia Essomba, daughter of Rene Essomba, an IOC member from Cameroon who died Aug. 31.

Swiss IOC executive committee

member Marc Hodler called the fund nothing more than a bribe, and Salt Lake City organisers have since apologised for the "embarrassment" caused by the scandal.

What is particularly frustrating to Paquet and his colleagues is that the Quebec City group long held suspicions that some rival bids were using underhanded methods to sway IOC voters.

"We had doubts that all the candidate cities were playing absolutely by the rules," said Paquet, a Quebec City lawyer and businessman. "But having doubts is one thing and being able to produce some specific facts is another."

Paquet said his group heard rumors that some of the rival bid groups resorted to devious means of winning votes, rumours that have been confirmed at the IOC meetings in Lausanne, Switzerland, last weekend.

He said the IOC has to get a better handle on how much each city spends in bidding for Games and

where the money goes. As for Salt Lake City's humanitarian aid package, Paquet said his group could not have set up such a fund even if it wanted to because every dollar spent by Quebec City 2002 had to be accounted for.

"No bid city had more of an open budget than we did," he said. "Because much of our budget came in the form of government and corporate grants, everybody knew where the money came from and where it went."

As with the case with Toronto 1996 bid chief Paul Henderson, Paquet was approached by an "agent" offering to help sway certain IOC members to vote Quebec City's way — for a price — during the bidding process for the Games.

"My answer was quick and precise," Paquet said. "We did not play that game."

AFP Asian Games briefs

Things go better with... not at these Games they don't: the 1996 Olympic Games almost drowned in advertising for a famous Atlanta-based soft-drink company. The Bangkok Asian Games, however, is one of the few major sporting events not to feel its fizzy tentacles — giving its major rivals a chance to hit back.

Officials at the Asian Games Athletes' Village estimate 590,000 cans of Pepsi will be consumed by competitors during the two-week competition. Overall, they expect athletes and officials to plug 1.69 million cans and bottles of drinks during the Games, which includes 600,000 bottles of water.

In addition, 1,200 kilograms of ice cubes are available for athletes who wish to keep their drinks cool when they train and compete outside the village.

Ramadan fast catered for: Muslim athletes at

the Asian Games will be able to observe the fast during month of Ramadan thanks to special food arrangements.

The dining hall at the Athletes' Village will start serving food from 4am on Saturday morning for Muslims who intend to fast. It would be their last meal until dusk as they go without food and water during daylight hours every day during Ramadan, the ninth month on the Muslim calendar.

Age is no barrier for Games footballers: While the Olympic Games is restricted to players under 23, no such ruling exists in the Asian Games, although teams prefer to send their younger stars.

Kuwait's two strikers are 17 and 18 years old while Iran are fielding several veteran World Cup players.

The Olympic age limit was brought in at the 1992 Barcelona Games after an agreement

between football's world governing body FIFA and the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

However, it is unlikely that the regional body, the Asian Football Confederation, will seek a similar arrangement with the Olympic Council of Asia, the continent's IOC equivalent.

Pep talk rebounds on Koreans: The head of South Korea table tennis is convinced too much pep talk may have cost them the women's doubles title.

"This morning they looked like robots," said Paek Myung-Youn, director general of the South Korean Table Tennis Association after Atlanta Olympic champion Ryu Ji-Hae and her partner Lee Eun-Sil went out in the semi-finals.

"Every day the federation reminded them of their heavy duty and it might have caused them mental stress," Paek said. "We tried to put more spirits into our players."

Kuwait strikes gold as Middle East shines

Taiwan pitcher Ming-Chieh Hsu burls against Chinese batter Min Ren during the 2nd inning action at the 13th Asian Games. Taiwan defeated China 10-6 and won the bronze medal in Baseball (AFP photo)

BANGKOK (R) — Kuwait's Jaber Alhamad struck gold in the men's karate at the Asian Games on Wednesday as the Middle East outshone the powerhouse of Japan.

"My body feels light, like I could fly," an exultant Alhamad told reporters after winning the gold medal in the men's over 75 kg individual kumite — or sparring — competition.

The lanky Kuwaiti dominated opponents in every round with his versatility and lightning reflexes. Time and again he feigned with his left before letting loose a searing right to the face.

"At the beginning I was cold and heavy, worrying about how I should fight each opponent but by the final round I was feeling good and knew I could just be myself," said Alhamad, who failed to make the medals board at the 1994 Asian Games in Hiroshima.

"Next I will become champion of the world."

A day after Japanese women swept up three karate golds, the only Japanese man to

mount the top step of the podium was Ryoki Abe in the kata demonstration event, while Middle Eastern fighters dominated the sparring events.

Iran proved strongest across the board, taking a gold in the up to 75 kg class and silvers in the two other events.

Iran's Ali Reza Katiraei pummeled Japan's Takahiro Niki into second place in the up to 75 kg class, and fellow Iranian Ali Shaterzadeh took silver after losing the over 75 kg final to Alhamad.

Kuwait's Ahmed Husain dashed Palestine's hopes of winning their first medal in any event in their Games debut when he beat Hasan Abu Hajar in the bronze medal bout of the up to 75 kg class.

Japan's Yasumasa Shimizu was knocked out of the over 75 kg competition before the quarter-finals.

Asked whether Japan was happy with their performance and Niki's silver medal, a Japanese coach shook his head in despair. "Only gold is good," he said.

South Koreans refuse to hand back medal

BANGKOK (AFP) — A major row erupted at the Asian Games on Wednesday when the South Korean delegation refused to hand back an equestrian bronze medal that organisers say belongs to Japan.

Choi Myung-Jin came third behind teammates Sun Jung Kyun and Shing Chang-Moos in the equestrian individual dressage final, but fell victim to new rules stopping one country winning all the medals.

South Korea have already lost two other bronze medals in tenpin bowling and archery because of the same rule.

Following several heated meetings, the organisers ruled that Japan's Toshitake Takechi, who came fourth, should get the bronze.

But the medal had already been presented to Choi, and the South Korean camp refused to hand it back.

A South Korean equestrian official said: "We are not going to return the bronze medal. We have had full consultations with officials of the interna-

tional equestrian federation on this issue." The South Koreans have protested that the rule should not apply to the equestrian event.

Japan's equestrian team leader Hiroshi Watanabe refused to get publicly involved in the medal storm.

"If I say anything it is going to make the matter more confusing. I am leaving it to the Japan Olympic Committee. I am not in a position to deal with why there are two different rules," Watanabe said.

An Japan Olympic Committee spokesman said the future of the medal would be raised with the Bangkok Asian Games Organising Committee (BAGOC).

South Korea have suffered a lot from the medal ruling. On Tuesday Lee Mi-Jeong of South Korea came third in the women's archery but lost the bronze medal to China's Lin Sang, who she had beaten in a playoff, because South Koreans took the top two places.

Last week, Cha Mi-jung came third in the women's

tenpin bowling — behind two other South Koreans — but also lost the medal, which went to fourth placed Yap Mun-ye of Malaysia.

Under rules introduced at Hiroshima four years ago, only two competitors from the same country can win a medal in an event.

At the time, Wei Jizhong, chairman of the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) insisted that every delegation knew of the rule.

But when it was pointed out that the rule was not in the technical handbook of regulations for every competition, Wei sent a letter to the Asian Bowling Federation admitting it was "unclear" and apologising.

The rule also caused chaos at the women's golf where where Taiwan's Lin Yu-Ping lost her bronze medal for the same reason. The golf organisers, unaware of the regulation, had to ask the OCA for a final clarifying ruling.

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Opposition considering pressing charges against government for barring activists from leaving for Damascus meeting

By Caroline Faraj

AMMAN — The opposition is considering pressing charges against the government after it barred political activists from leaving for Damascus to attend a conference organised by Palestinian groups protesting the recent amendment to the Palestinian National Charter.

The higher coordination committee for 13 opposition political parties had asked its legal committee Monday to study the possibility of filing a lawsuit against the government, as well as the interior minister for that action.

According to Salem Nahhas, secretary general of the leftist party, Hashd who chairs a committee representing the 13 parties, "we are consulting with our legal committee whether to file a

lawsuit or not within the coming week."

In a statement issued this week, the higher coordination committee described the government decision to ban citizens from travelling to Syria as "a violation of human rights and law and also the Constitution which stipulates that every Jordanian has the right to travel."

On Friday police barred a group of 32 persons, which included members of leftist, Pan-Arabist and Islamic parties, from leaving the Kingdom to attend a two-day meeting in Damascus that began Saturday.

Interior Minister Nayef Qadi stressed yesterday that the opposition has the right to file a lawsuit against him and the government.

"If the opposition are

intending to file a lawsuit against the government and myself, I believe that they have the right to do so," Qadi told the Jordan Times Wednesday.

"The opposition has the right to express their views freely in Jordan," he added. The minister reiterated the government's position that the decision to bar 32 persons from travelling to Damascus "came after having information that these persons will take part in a conference whose general objectives are levelled against Jordan, its policies and interests."

He also stressed that the government believes such participation could harm "the Kingdom's relations with some countries."

"All Jordanians are allowed to travel to any place they wish," according to the law.

Qadi said, "But if we have information that a particular person's travel will endanger Jordan's interests and its relations with some countries, we will never hesitate to (bar him/her from travelling)," the minister said.

The opposition parties are also urging the government to release from detention seven persons who were members of the delegation that was barred on Friday from travelling to Syria to attend the conference.

However, Qadi said earlier that "the detention is a precautionary measure, and they will stay in custody for few days then will be released."

During Sunday's session of the Lower House deputies criticised the government decision and said that it was "illegal" to ban the activists from travelling.

Court frees Ocalan

ANKARA (R) — A diplomatic crisis between NATO partners Turkey and Italy looked set to flare-up after an Italian court freed Kurdish guerrilla leader Abdullah Ocalan on Wednesday.

Last month, the two governments traded barbs and Turkish protesters smashed Italian goods in the streets in anger at Rome's refusal to extradite the rebel chief.

Italian authorities said they had only detained Ocalan because of a German arrest request. But when the Karlsruhe court withdrew its warrant, and with it a possible

extradition request, the Kurd rebel chief could no longer be held.

Italian Prime Minister Massimo D'Alema said later Ocalan would be kept under police surveillance and could not leave Italy, despite the court ruling. "What happened this morning has not changed the scenario... A surveillance order will be maintained," D'Alema told reporters after meeting party leaders to discuss the arrest.

But D'Alema added that a decision over what to do with the Kurdish rebel leader could wait only a few days longer.

China condemns use of force against Iraq

(Continued from page 1)

Qin said Butler's report "is apparently one-sided and does not reflect the situation on the ground."

He said UNSCOM should have consulted the council before evacuating the inspection team, a view echoed by Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov.

Meanwhile, France, in a rift among Western allies, dissociated itself on Wednesday from U.S.-led air strikes and said they could have grave consequences for the Iraqi people.

A statement issued by the French authorities about an hour after the launch of the campaign against Iraq said: "France deplores the escalation which led to the American military strikes against Iraq and the grave human consequences which they could have for the Iraqi people."

Turkey said on Thursday it was saddened by news of a joint American-British military strike against Iraq and expressed hope that the attack would be a short one.

"The developments are very saddening," a Turkish foreign ministry spokesman told Reuters in Ankara.

"We have always wanted the situation in Iraq to return to normal and the embargo to be lifted by Iraq's full compliance

with United Nations resolutions," he said.

Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien said that "Saddam Hussein has brought this crisis on himself."

The prepared statement was issued less than an hour after Washington and London announced they launched air strikes.

Chretien accused the Iraqi president of "following a deliberate strategy, at great cost to his country."

Germany said on Wednesday it was regrettable that there had been a military strike against Iraq but Iraq had had plenty of chances to avert the use of force.

"The Iraq government was warned that the international community could not look away" from its failure to comply with U.N. weapons inspectors, Chancellor Gerhard Schröder's spokesman Uwe-Karsten Heye told German Radio. "The German government regrets that it had to come to the military measure."

Heye later added in a statement that the international community had repeatedly called on Iraq to comply with the U.N. Security Council resolutions. He said Iraq had not fulfilled a promise made on Nov. 14 to comply with U.N. demands.

U.S. launches 'substantial' strikes against Iraq

(Continued from page 1)

The strikes came shortly after chief U.N. weapons inspector Richard Butler issued a report on Tuesday complaining that Iraq was breaking a pledge made only last month to give the inspectors full access, and was pulling them out.

In Kuwait, residents spending the weekend at beach homes in the south of the country said they heard what sounded like the launch of missiles possibly from U.S. ships deployed offshore. They said the loud bursts were heard some 30 minutes after midnight local time.

Blair, in a statement delivered outside his Downing Street residence, said: "We have exhausted all other avenues."

Describing British involvement as significant, Blair accused Iraqi President Saddam Hussein of "constant lies, prevarication and breaching of the agreed conditions." "We have no option but to act," he said, adding that the strikes were aimed at degrading Saddam's capability to build and use weapons of mass destruction.

The U.S. and Britain came within minutes of attacking Iraq when it last defied the inspectors just over a month ago.

President Saddam Hussein put Iraq on a war footing on Wednesday and urged his people to defy the U.S. attempt to make them "kneel."

The two came within minutes of attacking Iraq when it last defied the inspectors just over a month ago.

Israel pulls down 3 Palestinian homes under construction

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AFP) — Israeli bulldozers tore down three Palestinian houses in various stages of construction in east Jerusalem Wednesday, a day after U.S. President Bill Clinton's visit, witnesses said.

The bulldozers escorted by police demolished a house whose roof had already been built and two others which consisted only of walls in the Jabel Mukabber neighbourhood.

Wael Abu Dabaat, who was building the houses with two of his brothers, said their 30 family members needed new lodging but that the Israeli authorities had refused to give them a building permit, as often happens in Arab east Jerusalem.

"We will build again in spite of the demolitions," he said.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his government "don't want Palestinians to live here," he added.

Clinton said during his visit that he understood Palestinian irritation over the routine destruction of houses they are building.

The Palestinians say that they are forced to build without permits because Israel rarely grants them in order to

stop Palestinians from erecting new homes or expanding existing ones.

Israel has destroyed nearly 700 Palestinian houses since the signing of the 1993 Oslo accords with the Palestinians, according to the Palestinian committee on land and the environment.

About 2,000 other houses have been ordered demolished, the committee said.

Under the Israeli-Palestinian accords, the fate of Arab east Jerusalem, which is claimed by both parties, is supposed to be decided in final-status negotiations set to begin soon.

Israel occupied and illegally annexed the eastern part of the Holy City in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war.

In another development, the Israeli army arrested 17 Palestinians on the West Bank overnight on suspicion of involvement in "hostile activities," an army spokesman said Wednesday.

Fourteen of the suspects were picked up in a sweep through the village of Harmalah near Bethlehem and three elsewhere in the West Bank, he said.

He said the 17 were detained "on suspicion of involvement in hostile activities" but did not elaborate.

Government to decide on IPC Saturday

(Continued from page 1)

But informed sources stressed that legal action concerning the IPC pipelines sale seemed unlikely since there was no evidence of embezzlement or corruption, but rather some sort of flaw in bid procedures.

The Lower House committee is expected to reach a final decision about the IPC case during the coming few days.

On Nov. 21, the government halted all procedures related to the sale of 50 kilometres of 12-inch pipelines and 60 kilometres of 16-inch pipelines which formed part of a disputed pipeline from Iraq to Haifa, and ordered that work on removing the segments be stopped.

In earlier reports, sources

told the Jordan Times, "It is clear that the sale of the pipelines was worth up to JD1.5 million, and in any case definitely more than the JD250,000 which the contractor had paid for the pipeline."

The bidding committee did not adhere to the procedures followed in such cases, the report concluded.

As for the present condition of the IPC pipelines, the report concluded that the field investigations showed that about 50 per cent of the 12-inch pipelines and 25 per cent of the 16-inch pipelines were worn out.

The government issued instructions to store all IPC pipelines at the Aqaba Region Authority pending the conclusion of the investigation.



The aircraft carrier USS Enterprise (CVN 65) prepares for flight operations with embarked Carrier Air Wing Three (CVW-3). The Enterprise heads a U.S. naval armada poised in the Gulf for strikes against Iraq on Wednesday following a new U.N. report that Baghdad was not cooperating with arms inspections (Reuters file photo)

Saddam puts Iraq under 4 commands

BAGHDAD (AP) — President Saddam Hussein on Wednesday divided Iraq into four military commands and handed their control to four trusted aides, state media reported.

The move was apparently aimed at preventing any civil uprising against his rule in case the imminent U.S.-British attacks deal severe blows to his authority.

Saddam will, however, retain control over the air force, air defence units and missile units, television and radio stations announced, interrupting normal programming.

The air defence, rather than ground forces, will be Saddam's best hope to counter any air strikes.

The reports said Saddam issued a presidential decree to make the changes.

After the end of the 1991 Gulf war that routed Saddam's forces from Kuwait, 14

provinces in the Shiite south as well as Kurdish north rebelled against the government, but were put down brutally.

The media reports said the Intelligence Department, controlled by a close relative of the president, and the Special Security, run by his son, Qusai, will remain untouched. Special Security is responsible for Saddam's personal security.

The elite Saddam's Commandos, run by Saddam's other son, Uday, will also stay with him, the media reported. The commandos help the Special Security and the Intelligence in their work.

Leaving the three units in trusted hands implied that in case of a personal threat to Saddam, he will continue to have the support of key loyal forces.

The media reports said the four new military commands set up in Iraq are:

The Northern Region, comprising the three Kurdish governorates of Sulaymaniya, Erbil and Dohuk and the northern governorate of Mosul. The region will be commanded by the vice chairman of the decision-making Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), Izzat Ibrahim.

The southern region consisting of Basra, Dhiqar, Misan and Wasit to be commanded by an RCC member, Ali Hasan Al Majid, a cousin of Saddam.

The Central Euphrates region consisting of predominantly Shiite areas of Babylon, Karbala, Najaf, Qadisiya and Muthana will be led by Deputy Prime Minister Mohammad Hamza Al Zubeidi, an RCC member.

The Central region of Baghdad, Salahdin, Anbar, Diyala will be commanded by Defence Minister Hashim Ahmad Sultan.

Netanyahu to call early polls

(Continued from page 1)

"Netanyahu's speech was the launch of the campaign," he said. Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon, speaking immediately after Netanyahu to the Likud leaders, also said early polls were inevitable.

"We cannot continue in the current situation and we have decided, because we have no other choice, to move the elections forward," he said.

Opposition Labour Party leader Ehud Barak ruled out any chance his party would back Netanyahu's motion or join in a national unity government.

"We are going to elections, there can be no unity government," he said.

Netanyahu's initiative appeared above all aimed at avoiding defeat in Monday's no confidence vote, which would provoke new elections within 60 days.

If he initiates the early polls, he can seek a later date in agreement with the Labour Party and gain more time to prepare for the election.

Israeli television reported that Netanyahu had already chosen a preferred date for the elections — April 27 — shortly after the patriotic annual independence day celebrations and ahead of May 4, when the Palestinians have threatened to declare an independent state.

Elections are not scheduled to be held until 2000.

Arafat denounces suspension of pullback

(Continued from page 1)

"Until now the prime minister said he was unable to tell the cabinet that the Palestinians have honoured their obligations and it is thus impossible to carry out the withdrawal scheduled for December 18," the government said in its statement.

"If they honour their commitments, we will honour ours," it added.

Another Palestinian minister, Hassan Asfour, had responded earlier to Netanyahu's decision by say-

ing the Palestinians could suspend their implementation of security measures required by the Wye agreements.

"If Netanyahu does not implement, we will not continue to implement," he said.

While Shaath withdrew the threat, he was scathing about Israeli efforts to evade their obligations under the U.S.-brokered agreement. "This cannot go on... the burden is now on Netanyahu's shoulders to fulfill the agreement," Shaath said, noting that the Wye accords committed not only the government of Israel

but the Israeli people to its land-for-security requirements.

Shaath also reaffirmed the Palestinians' right to unilaterally declare an independent state next May if negotiations with Israel fail to advance — an intention Netanyahu singled out as one of the Palestinians' worst violations of the peace accords.

"We will give all the time necessary to negotiations on a final status until May 4," Shaath said, referring to the date with interim peace accords with Israel expire.

Request to lift Abbadi's immunity sent to committee

(Continued from page 1)

"I was surprised on Tuesday by many local and foreign journalists who called me inquiring about whether or not I received a letter from the prosecutor general..." Majali said.

"I completely denied that because I had not actually received anything relating to that matter. However, I found out that [Petra] ran a report saying I had received such a letter."

Majali stressed that he only received the letter on Wednesday and has asked the government to investigate Petra's report, which he said violated the Press and Publications Law, and to hold those officials responsible for running the story accountable.

"I have asked the prime minister to study the matter," Majali told the Jordan Times on Wednesday. "This is the responsibility of the government especially since Petra is an official institution."

A skirt made of live grass

OVERIJSE (R) — Dior, Lagerfeld and Versace eat your heart out. A Belgian horticulturalist has come up with the ultimate ecological fashion statement to give your loved one this Christmas: A skirt made of live grass. The clothes — skirts, tops and dresses — are the idea of Luc Mertens, who lives in the Belgian town of Overijse. The grass is grown on jute matting, instead of earth, for about 25 days, and is then made into garments which continue to grow while you wear them. The end product is striking, if not comfortable: The clothes weigh several kilograms and the water needed to keep the grass alive makes them quite damp.

A French scent for the subway

PARIS (AP) — The French are good at making perfume, but this one may be a stretch: a scent for the subway? That's what the Paris transit authority is offering soon at one station in the French capital in order to make subway travel more pleasant. The floors of the Invalides station, near the Eiffel Tower, will be washed and spread with the perfume, the RATP said Tuesday. The scent to be used will be revealed Friday.

Crook posing as gynaecologist

PARIS (AFP) — A 48-year-old Haitian man was jailed for two years Tuesday for swindling nearly \$190,000 from several people, including a lawyer, while posing as a gynaecologist. Jean-Max Beaulieu moved his victims to reach into their pockets by telling them he had been robbed of his credit cards while heading to the airport to fly to New York, where he had to assist a patient in an emergency situation. Although his scam sometimes failed, he managed between 1996-97 to convince a bar owner, a shopkeeper and a lawyer, among others, to help him out, in exchange for a promise of repayment following a call to his bank in New York.

Sexual dissatisfaction cause of unhappy marriages

BEIJING (AFP) — Sexual dissatisfaction is the main cause of unhappy marriages in rural China, according to a recent survey of rural attitudes to married life reported in the official media Wednesday. Asked what were the main reasons for marital discontent, 44 per cent of couples surveyed in rural eastern Anhui province said a disharmonious sex life, which was described by the official Xinhua news agency as "an unspeakable pain in the old days." The Marriage and Family Research Society survey also found that arranged marriages, once the scourge of women's rights in pre-revolutionary China, were now virtually unheard of in the countryside, with hardly any respondents subscribing to the practice, Xinhua said.

Warning to customers hoping for sexy Christmas

LONDON (R) — Britain's biggest bookseller, W H Smith, issued a red-faced warning to customers hoping for a sexy Christmas with their gift pack edition of the Kama Sutra: "Do not use the massage oil." "The massage oil in the pack may cause irritation to sensitive parts of the body," it said in a recall notice published in British newspapers. It asked purchasers to return for a refund the gift pack, which consisted of a pocket-size copy of the Kama Sutra, a 1,500-year-old Indian sex manual, and some "sensual massage oil."

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